

The Body of Christ - Its Identity

by Stella Paterson

It is a well known fact that the *church* is often referred to as the "Body of Christ." But with the word "church" being seen as a building where people go to *worship God*, how do we define the "Body of Christ?" If He has a body on earth, how has it come into being? And how do we identify it? What is unique about it? If it is actually the body of the living and all-powerful Christ, how does it function in the earth? Is there a false body of Christ? What is the difference between the true and the false? As we often say, the Bible has the answer.

There are many passages quoted throughout this article. Please read them all. It is so easy to skip over some we recognize as having read many times, and we think we know what they say. But to hear what the Lord is saying to us today, let us take time to read every word.

What Christ's body is not

How many are there who consider themselves a part of the Body of Christ? How many of the countless denominations and sects believe they are *the* called and chosen, seeing themselves as the Lord's *elite* because they have the *truth*? The Lord's body is not fractured, as we will discover here. It is not made up of throngs of people who go chasing after the signs and wonders or emotionally charged *ministers* who appeal to their itching ears. Of such ministers, Peter said, "*For, uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage.*" (2 Peter 2:18-19 RV) And of those who have followed these false teachers, Peter then said, "*For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the last state is become worse with them than the first.*"

Would the Lord have had Peter and others speak so clearly about false teachers and their followers if He considered them to be true members of His Body? Do we think it doesn't grieve Him to see what is happening more so today than at any other time? If they choose to follow others and to follow their own fleshly desires in the name of Christianity, they are choosing not to be a part of His Body--while at the same time, they believe they are.

Most of those who believe they are *born again* Christians own and read a Bible. This would include the false teachers and false prophets, expounding with great eloquence their manipulative but deceiving messages *from God's Word*.

By "Bible" we don't mean any one particular version; they have all been influenced by the bias of the translators who try to make 'good English' composition out of old language words. Add to that the interpretation of the mind of flesh, and a *Bible* can mean almost anything one desires.

The true Bible is the God-breathed words that were heard by the scribes of old, and now, thousands of years later, only the Spirit of God can reveal the truth of the written word. Without Him, our minds of flesh will too easily see the Bible as a book of rules by which to live.

For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because **the veil is removed in Christ**. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. **But whenever one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.** ~ 2 Corinthians 3:14b-16 EMTV

The same can be said for reading the New Testament--if one believes he is *born again* but remains flesh because of a false *conversion* at the hands of those proclaiming a false gospel. Or maybe he/she has become hardened to the voice of the Spirit, having once known His presence, and now sees the Bible only through eyes of flesh. That kind of thing will cause us to become judgmental and dogmatic--anything but Christ-likeness.

This is but a sampling of what Christ's body is not. So, let's look at . . .

How the Body of Christ came into being

All true believers in Christ Jesus, who have been born again [*anew*], become a part of the Body of Christ. Jesus told Nicodemus, "*Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.'*" (John 3:3b; 6-7) Paul spoke of the same when he said, "*Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new.*" (2 Corinthians 5:17) We must include Paul's words to those at Rome. "*But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*" (Romans 8:9)

Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about seeing *the kingdom of God*, that it cannot be, until and unless a man is born anew. With the new birth, an amazing thing transpires! "*And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God would come, he [Jesus] answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God comes not with observation [Greek: 'ocular evidence']: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you!'*" (Luke 17:20-21)

Jesus Christ comes by His Spirit to dwell in us! He is the Head and we are His Body. It is His kingdom, and He reigns! He cares for and nourishes us, as we see in Paul's words to the Ephesians.

So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but **nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the ekklesia: for we are members of his body**, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. **This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the ekklesia.** ~ Ephesians 5:28-32 (paraphrased with Greek meanings)

To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**; whom we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect [Greek: 'complete'] **in Christ Jesus**; ~ Colossians 1:27-28 EMTV

The Greek word for "mystery" is defined, by *Thayer*, as "**a hidden or secret thing, not obvious to the understanding.**" In every verse in the New Testament where *mystery* occurs, we see it has the same meaning. Two such verses are these, which refer to the *mystery of godliness* and the *mystery of iniquity*.

1. "*And without controversy great is the **mystery of godliness**; He who was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the spirit, Seen of angels, Preached among the nations, Believed on in the world, Received up **in glory.***" (1Timothy 3:16 ASV)

2. "*For the **mystery of lawlessness** [Greek: 'wickedness'] is already at work; only He who now restrains will continue until one comes out of the midst.*" (2 Thessalonians 2:7 EMTV)

The phrase "received up **in glory**" is more accurately translated in the ASV. The KJV used the word "into", which is incorrect, and suggests that *glory* is a place. This has led to songs being written and beliefs being held that *glory* is another name for *heaven*. The Greek definition for *in* is "a fixed position/a relation of rest."

So when Jesus prayed for His own, He said, "*And the glory* [Greek: 'glory, as very apparent'] *which You have given to Me, I have given to them, so that **they may be one just as We are one**: I in them, and You in Me; so that they may be **perfected in unity**, and so that the world may know that You have sent Me, and You loved them just as You loved Me.*" (John 17:22-23 EMTV)

In a day when so many are feverishly trying to please God through efforts of *self*, which really only impress others, this is what the Lord desires of us:

Therefore, brothers, I exhort you through the compassions of God, to **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable [Greek: 'logical'] service. And do not fashion yourselves after this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and well pleasing and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself too highly, beyond what you should think, but to think soberly, as God has imparted to each one a measure of faith. For **just as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.** ~ Romans 12:1-5 EMTV

After presenting our bodies a living sacrifice and allowing the Holy Spirit to have His way in us, Paul's advice in this passage is fitting.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at *the right hand* of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and **your life has been hidden with Christ in God.** ~ Colossians 3:1-3 EMTV

We must look closely at the very next verse. "*When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested [Greek: 'be rendered apparent'] in glory.* (Colossians 3:4 RV) "In glory" does not mean *in heaven*. The same word meanings for "manifest" (appear) and "in" glory, as we covered earlier, apply here as well. Now let's look at Paul's words spoken immediately following the previously quoted passage where he tells of the veil being lifted.

Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all, **with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.** ~ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 EMTV

Those words in bold print tell us what the true Body of Christ should look like.

It is only by the Spirit of the Lord that the real Body of Christ is visible. And the fruit of that same Spirit will be evidence of His presence--not just one attribute (if we could call it that), but ALL. All fruit of the Holy Spirit is seen in a true member of Christ's body. What do **we** see in that *mirror*? Are we being transformed into His image from glory to glory? What fruit is evident to those around us?

The living body

The Body of Christ is a living organism. As Head of the body, Jesus Christ is the Life source. His Spirit is the Power by which the Body functions. There are no divisions--only unity in the faith. "*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and **in us all.***" (Ephesians 4:4-6 EMTV)

There is no need for elaboration on many of the passages quoted. Even with our English language and its deficiencies in translating from the old languages, the message is very clear. This one, for example, needs no comment.

For just as the body is one and has many parts, but all the parts of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and we were all given to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one part but many. ~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14

And the passage goes on to speak of the functions of the various parts of the human body, then continues on with. . .

But now God has set the parts, each one of them, in the body just as He desired. And if all parts were one part, where would be the body? But now indeed there are many parts, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." But to a greater degree the parts of the body which seem weaker are necessary. And the parts of the body which we consider to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater propriety. But our presentable parts have no need. But God united the body, giving greater honor to the part being inferior, lest there be divisions in the body, but the parts care the same for one another. And if one part suffers, all the parts suffer together; or if one part is honored, all the parts rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ~ 1 Corinthians 12:18-27 EMTV

This passage describes the function of some parts of Christ's Body:

And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; **for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ:** till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may **grow up**

in all things into him, which is the head, even Christ; from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the **increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love.**
~ Ephesians 4:11-16 RV

A few more thoughts

Is life then a *bed of roses* where we experience nothing but wonderful things? Do we walk in prosperity and health as described by the *word of faith* crowd? Was Jesus loved by everyone? Was He respected by those in *authority*? No, we know He wasn't; He was persecuted and viciously beaten before He died on the Cross. Do we have a right to expect anything better? "*Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (2 Timothy 3:12 RV) "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.*" (Romans 8:18-19)

But we have this treasure in clay vessels, so that the extraordinary character of the power may be of God and not of us; in everything being oppressed, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; cast down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, so that also the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body. **For we who are living are always handed over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifest in our body.** 2 Corinthians 4:7-11

The true Body of Christ practices daily the giving over of *self* to the crucifying power of the resurrected and living Christ. Their whole desire is for Him to be manifested in them, so that they are being changed from glory to glory.

The false body of Christ is taken up with the things of this life, being watchful to always follow the *rules* of the Bible, which they are comfortable with. It may be that the ones they are not comfortable with, they will apply to others with whom they don't agree. This admonition to the true Body may well be describing them and their actions.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or of a new moon or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no one rule against you, desiring to do so in false humility and in worship of the angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, in vain being puffed up by his carnal mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, supported and joined together by joints and ligaments, grows with the growth of God. If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you submit to regulations--"Do not handle, nor taste, nor

touch," things are all for corruption with the using, according to the commands and teaching of men? These things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in **self-imposed religion, false humility**, and severity on the body, **but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.** ~ Colossians 2:16-23 EMTV

The false body of Christ are those who seek to follow signs and wonders, as though Christ is *here* or *there*. This is where so much deception has crept in. Too many "signs and wonders" are the *lying* ones of which Paul spoke in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Jesus said that *signs will follow those* who have fully put their trust in Him. Why is that? Because He dwells in them, and it is His work!

We must aspire to walk in perfect oneness with Christ, emptied of *self* and humbly submitted to the Holy Spirit. What a glorious sight Christ's Body is, as He is manifested in her! When she is looked upon by those in *the world*, all that will be seen is Jesus. There will be no question as to her identity.