

The CHURCH and the WORLD

In a Healthy Organism



“Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows, and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.” Ephesians 3:14-16 (NIV)

This description of the Church as a body applies to both the global Church throughout history and to each local church. In **1 Corinthians, chapter 12**, we find a more detailed description of the organisation of this organism, the local body of Christ. In both passages (**Ephesians 3** and **1 Corinthians 12**) the emphasis is on love, humility, and unity.

Consider those two words - organism and organisation. We might think of them as opposing forces, yet... look at God's creative handiwork in our world of organisms. What organism is not organised? Central nervous systems, digestive systems, respiratory systems, and others are all highly functioning systems designed to sustain the organism and cause it to grow into maturity. Even the simplest of all microscopic organisms have order and purpose.

How exciting to consider that we don't have to remain infants, neither individually, nor collectively. We are called to maturity as a body with Christ as our head.

EXPLORE AND SHARE

Throughout the New Testament, we see that the Church is rarely about individuals but, rather, it is a unified, collective, living body... where those in your connect and in your campus are called to each other and, indeed, need each other.

1. When one part hurts (1 Corinthians 12:24b-26) The picture that is painted, here, could seem idealised. Aren't some people more difficult to love than others? Aren't we naturally drawn to people who are easy to be around? Don't we gravitate to people who cause us to laugh with them?

Discuss: *What makes this type of humility and care for others possible? What could we do when we find this way of living difficult to navigate? Share some examples of times when you have been blessed by someone's care in your local body?*

2. Each part is necessary (1 Corinthians 12:14-21, Romans 12:2) Paul is describing a rather hilarious situation — a foot feeling like it doesn't fit in the group because it is not a hand, an ear feeling glum because it is not an eye, an eye telling a hand “I don't need you!” Imagine an entire body being just one big eye... are you picturing some abstract art representing these images, perhaps?

Discuss: *How do we have a genuine appreciation for each part of our local body? Our connect? In Romans 12:2, what is the measurement standard that defines humility? Where does one cross the line into “more highly than I ought to think”?*

3. Unity is the result, not the goal (Romans 12:12-14, John 15:1-17) Many would say that if we have unity as our goal, we are sure to fail. We tend to value our own efforts in working toward unity and resent failings that we perceive as others' lack of effort. Often, we can't even agree on what to be unified around. In the Body of Christ, there is one clear way to have unity. This passage in Romans points out that it happens in a diverse local body with Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free. Consider another image for a group of believers in Jesus — the vine and branches. The passage in John 15 points to our source of both life and unity!

Discuss: *How is uniformity a deceiving substitute for unity? Why is unity very possible in the Body of Christ? Consider the idea that the struggle is in remaining unified? What are the enemies of unity and how could we respond when we see divisiveness?*

PRAYER

Lord God, Almighty! Thank You for the Holy Spirit within each one of us. Thank You that by Your Spirit, we are unified. Move in each of us to remain in the vine, to cling to the vine, and in so doing to remain united with each other. We acknowledge You, Jesus, as our source of health and our source of unity. Reign in our hearts, Lord God. Amen.

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SUGGESTED RESOURCES on The Church and the World:

The Mission of God, Christopher J.H. Wright

Kingdom Conspiracy, Scot McKnight

Letters to the Church, Francis Chan

The Jesus Way, Eugene H. Peterson