

LIVING PORTRAITS OF THE CHURCH

Finding Your Place in the Body

1 Corinthians 12:4–27



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Studies in anatomy occupy the attention of every medical student in the world. If they hope to understand how to help people with physical needs, they must know how the body is put together, how it functions, and what causes it to malfunction.

Christians would do well to emulate students of medicine. Since we are members of His body, over which Christ serves as the Head, understanding the body would give us a better understanding of the church—how it's put together, how it functions, and how to respond when it malfunctions. Just as the human body is fearfully and wonderfully made, so is Christ's universal body. It is full of variety and diversity, yet harmony can exist. It is designed to be active, healthy, and productive, yet disease can invade, bringing aches and pains, causing crippling results and leading to a breakdown and even a paralysis of certain parts of the body. As we seek a better understanding of this third analogy of the church (the others were family and flock), let's keep the mental picture of a body uppermost in our thinking.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Communication: Benefits of Using Simple Analogies

The writers of and speakers in the Bible often use word pictures and analogies to get their points across. With a form of communication that is so dominant, it helps us to consider its value to us, especially as we seek to understand the church through biblical analogies. Three significant features of these analogies, particularly in the teaching of Jesus, rise to the top.

First, *analogies use the familiar to explain the unfamiliar*. People can identify with searching for a lost coin or sowing seed on a plot of land. Jesus often started right where people were. Second, *analogies simplify the complicated*. Jesus spoke in terms that even children could understand, bringing near to people that which was profound. Finally, *analogies provide word pictures that are easily remembered*. When we hear a story or get a concrete object in our minds, we are more apt to remember the teaching than if we were just dealing with abstract ideas.



Quotable

*The church is
not our body, but
Christ's body.
He is the only
Head.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Observation: Insights from Examining Human Anatomy

As we examine Paul’s analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:4–27, we find two distinct emphases. First, Paul emphasized that the church should remain unified in the midst of diversity. Later in the passage, Paul stressed that our diversity should be held together in unity. In other words, Paul placed both unity and diversity out in front, giving them both pride of place in this passage. That means we can neither discard unity nor diversity, but we should strive to live well with both as goals for the body of Christ.

Three particular thoughts come to mind as we think carefully about the diversity of the body. First, *there are many parts . . . each one is important*. We should not have the mind-set that someone else’s gift or contribution is important while ours is not. Every person can make valuable contributions to the church. Second, *there are many parts . . . all are interdependent*. Within the church, we all depend on one another to exercise our own gifts and talents so that others benefit. Finally, *there are many parts . . . none is exclusive*. Jesus is the Head of the body, and all who follow Him make up the body. We are not exclusive to ourselves, nor is the church just about Jesus and each of our individual lives—the collective matters.



A CLOSER LOOK

Signs of Vitality in the Body of Christ

Sometimes people ask, “Do I have to join a church to become a Christian?” No, but once you become a Christian, God *wants* you to join a local church for teaching and fellowship. You automatically become a member of the universal body, His church, when you believe. No problem there. Usually, the problems begin to occur when we join a local church made up of fallible people just like us. Attending church should be a joyful and uplifting experience, but it may not be if a church’s vital signs of health and wholeness are missing. Therefore, when looking to join a body of Christ’s followers, look for signs of vitality and health such as unity and harmony, an absence of prejudice, an emphasis on individual dignity and mutual variety, a de-emphasis on independence and self-sufficiency, the support of others, and the exaltation of Christ as the Head and supreme authority.



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LET'S LIVE IT

People might have different reactions to Paul's teaching on the body of Christ. Three come to mind:

- First, *"Lord, thank you for including me."* Some will hear the teaching about Christ's body, the church, and be grateful to be a part of it.
- Second, *"Lord, I'm available!"* Others, when confronted with the reality of the church, will make clear their availability to the Lord.
- Third, *"Lord, without You, I'm out of control."* When we recognize we need Christ as our Head in the church, we will understand our own impulsiveness.

How does Paul's teaching on the body of Christ make you react? Where do you see yourself in regard to the three options above? What makes you say that?



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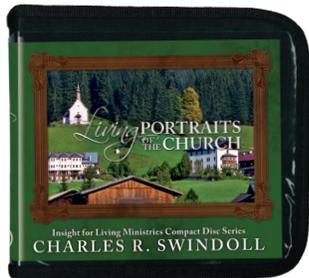
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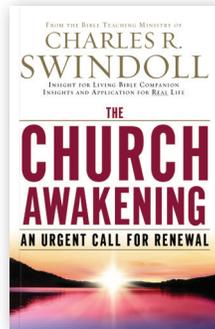
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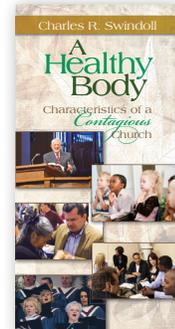
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