

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Functioning as Christ's Body"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 3/7/2010

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Introduction

Today, we're continuing to examine the fourth major point that the Apostle Paul teaches the believers at the church in Colosse. He is telling them that the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in genuine Gospel ministry. Jesus Christ and His inerrant Word have first place in any ministry, and in any church, that is worthy of being called a genuine Gospel ministry.

Last time we saw that Paul calls the church the Body of Jesus Christ. In verse 18 he says that Christ "is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." And in verse 24 he says it again. Paul says that his afflictions in the ministry are "for the sake of [Christ's] body, which is the church."

Last time we began examining five propositions about the Body of Christ. We covered four of them last time, and we're going to cover the fifth one today. Let me give them to you again:

1.) The Body of Christ consists of all who place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin. That is the sole qualification for membership. The Holy Spirit places you in the Body of Christ as soon as you place your faith in Christ for salvation. Being a member of the spiritual Body of Christ is not the same as being a baptized or voting member of a local church.

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2.) The Body of Christ consists of all believers of all time. There is one body, because through all of time the membership qualification has been the same. Old Testament saints placed their faith in the Redeemer who would come, and today we place our faith in the Redeemer who has come.

3.) The Body of Christ is the true spiritual Israel. Membership in the Body of Christ has no ethnic qualification. Both Jew and Gentile, those from among all nations and tribes and tongues, all believers are members of the one true Body of Christ, and the Apostle Paul calls it the "Israel of God."

4.) The Body of Christ is the general assembly of the called-out ones. We have been called out of the world, into the Body of Christ. Our citizenship as believers is no longer in this world, it is in Heaven.

The Body's Purpose & Functions: 3 Main Passages

Now, we looked at some of the Scriptures pertaining to each of those four points last time. Today we come to point number five, which is this:

5.) The Body of Christ, meeting principally as local assemblies, is God's primary vehicle for the propagation of the Gospel and the maturing of believers.

This is the purpose of the Body of Christ. This is the Great Commission. Preach the Gospel to world, and build up the saints in the faith. That is the Christ-ordained mission of the church. Now as we begin to look at this aspect of the doctrine of the Body of Christ today, I want to read three passages of Scripture, and I trust that if

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you are able to, you will follow along as I read. The first one is in Romans chapter twelve. The second one is in First Corinthians chapter twelve. And the last one will be in Ephesians chapter four. So please follow along as I read. I'm beginning now, in Romans chapter twelve, verse four:

For 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. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

And next, turn with me, if you would please, to First Corinthians chapter twelve, beginning at verse twelve, and I'm going to read down through verse twenty-eight:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members 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 have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the

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body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?

But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet 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." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need.

But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the Body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.

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And finally, turn with me, if you would please, to the book of Ephesians chapter four, beginning at verse one, and I'm going to read down through verse sixteen:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with

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every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Now, what does all of this mean for you as a believer within the Body of Christ? How does this affect you, and apply to you, as a Christian? Well, I want to now give you a list of the things that these passages, along with many others, teach us about the Body of Christ, and you place in it.

Christ's Authority the Only Legitimate Authority

First of all, these passages teach us that the one supreme authority in the church is Jesus Christ, and His Word. All authority in the church is rooted and grounded in that authority. Any authority that is not grounded in Jesus Christ and His Word alone is illegitimate authority.

Offices Under Christ's Authority

Secondly, Jesus Christ has given gifts to His body. And the passage we read in Ephesians speaks of the fact that He has given men in positions of leadership as His gifts to the Body of Christ. Who are those leaders? The Bible defines three offices within the church. First, there is the office of pastor-teacher. It is the job of the

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pastor-teacher to preach the Word to the flock that God has given to him. It is the job of the pastor-teacher to feed them with spiritual food. It is his job to be an example to the flock of God in all things. It is his job to preach the Gospel to all men. And always, the pastor-teacher is spoken of in the Word of God as a minister, as a servant, and as a man who is separated unto the Gospel of Christ.

Being a pastor-teacher is not a profession, it is not a career, it is a calling. It is unique among all occupations on earth, because the pastor-teacher, the minister, is given the divine calling to open up God's Word and teach it and preach it as though God Himself were speaking. That is a high calling, and it is a humbling calling. Any man who enters into that calling without humility is going to fail. Any man who enters the pulpit on any Sunday without a deep sense of his calling is going to fail. God truly uses the man who recognizes that he is but a vessel and a channel to communicate God's truth to people, and he needs to be a clean vessel in order to do that.

The second office in the Body of Christ is that of elder. It is the responsibility of the elders to watch diligently over the flock that God has committed into their care. They should visit the people, especially the sick. It is their job to instruct those who are not knowledgeable in the faith. It is their job to guide those who have strayed from the faith. It is their job to comfort those who mourn. It is the job of the elders to nourish and guard the flock in the faith. It is their job to pray for the people in their care. The elders must set a worthy example to the flock in all things. And it is their job, along with the pastor-teacher, to make sure that the local church, and everyone in

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it, stays true to the Word of God – that there is no doctrinal deviancy. The Body of Christ must have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to any deviation from the clear truth of the Word of God.

The third office in the Body of Christ that is mentioned in the Word is the office of deacon. The office of deacon as set forth in the Scriptures is primarily an office of sympathy and service, following after the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. The deacons are responsible to really encourage the communion of the saints, especially by encouraging people to help one another in their times of need. It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is the duty of the deacons to help to develop the grace of liberality among the members of the church, by their own example to encourage God's people to give of themselves and of their monies and earthly goods, in order to help those who are in need. And it is the deacons who take responsibility for to distributing gifts that are given to the church, for the use of those who are in need.

We aren't going to go into the passages where the qualifications of pastors, elders, and deacons are given in the Bible. But the Word does give clear and specific qualifications, and they need to be followed. You will find those qualifications primarily in three passages: First Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; and First Peter 5:1–5.

So there are those three offices of leadership and ministry that God has ordained in the Body of Christ, and the Bible also makes it clear that those offices are to be filled by men only, and not by women. That does not mean that women are second-class

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citizens in the Body of Christ. It simply means that God has established male headship in the Body of Christ just as He has in the marriage relationship and in the home, and we need to submit to God's wise commandments in those matters. Men need to step up and take their responsibility as servant-leaders, and women need to function under their leadership.

Every Believer Has a Place Within the Body

The passages we read also make another key point about the Body of Christ, which is this: Everyone who is a believer has a place within the Body. No one is excluded. Some may have a more prominent place, while others may have a less prominent place. God gives different people different gifts.

The passages that we looked at name those gifts. Romans twelve tells us that some people have the gift of prophecy, and that is not a word that speaks of telling the future. The word in the original language means that someone has the gift of delivering a warning from God – proclaiming the Gospel to the lost, and pointing believers to the path of righteousness.

Romans also tells us that some people have the gift of ministry, in other words, the gift of serving others in various ways. Some have the gift of teaching, in other words, expositing and explaining the Word of God to people, and showing them how to put it into practice in their daily lives. Other people have the gift of exhortation, which means to stir up someone else by way of encouragement. Some people have the gift of giving – of their time, of their talents, of their goods, of their monies, and most of

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all, of themselves. Some people have the gift of leadership in the church. Some people have the gift of mercy, in other words, the gift of showing compassion toward other people, and expressing that compassion in practical ways.

First Corinthians additionally speaks of those who have the gift of administration, doing the things that are necessary so that the local church may operate in a decent and orderly manner, and so that the financial dealings of the church will be absolutely honest and above reproach. And it speaks of the gift of helps, of giving aid to people in need. It also speaks of some people having a particular gift of wisdom within the church. I have known pastors who have found that some of the least educated people in the church, in worldly terms, are sometimes the people in the church who have the greatest wisdom. They are people who can provide much-needed counsel and guidance not only to the members of the church, but also to the leadership. And so we need to be in a position of humility to accept such wise counsel, no matter where it comes from within the Body of Christ.

Needed: Renewal of the Church as the Local Body of Christ

One of the main reasons we have such problems in society today is because the church has failed to function as it should as the Body of Jesus Christ.

On one of our very first broadcasts, I mentioned the name of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and the experience of a church that he pastored many years ago in the British Isles. When Dr. Lloyd-Jones came to that church, he found that it was off-message, off-mission, off the battlefield, and on the shelf as far as God's purpose was

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concerned. He understood that his mission as a pastor was to get the church back into the Word, and to pull down all of the things that had been built up over time that were contrary to the Word. And the result at that church was a revolution. The revolution started inside the doors of the church. And it spread to the surrounding community.

Lives were changed. Hardships were eased. Increasing numbers, even non-Christians who observed what was happening without the full understanding of a mind transformed by the Gospel, saw that the revolution in that church was a far more effective answer to the problems of the times than anything else the church had proposed or tried.

There is no telling what God can do if we His people repent of our un-Scriptural ways. The hand of God's righteous wrath is poised against this nation, and rightly so. This nation has fallen into great evil. And I believe the main reason is that the evangelical church in this country has become so ineffectual. We have neglected our calling as the Body of Christ. We have neglected to do the things that are the earmarks of genuine Gospel ministry under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is bad enough that God's Word has been pushed aside in the public square. But in our time, the Word of God has been pushed aside within the evangelical church. The Bible lost its influence in the nation, because the Bible lost its influence in the church. The church has gone after all kinds of other things. And that's where the problem must be solved – in the church. But the answer to the political and economic

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and moral and social crises of our times is not for evangelicals to organize more political pressure groups. The answer is not for evangelicals to become involved in a wider range of so-called faith-based initiatives. The answer is not for evangelicals to seek empty promises from political candidates. And the answer is not for the evangelical church to reinvent itself to try to please the world.

The answer to the crisis of our times is submission to the Word of God. We need to repent. We need to make some hard decisions. We need to give up practices, and associations, and relationships that are contrary to God's Word. It is not the easy thing to do, but God will bless His church for it, and that in turn will be a blessing to the nation.

About the Broadcast

The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is to preach the Gospel to the lost, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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