

G L O S S A

Members of the Corporate Christ

The believers, as members of the Body of Christ, by virtue of their union with Christ, are the corporate Christ in both life and nature. By being blended together, individual members are also brought into a life union with the other members of the Body. The Body of Christ is one of the deepest and most profound mysteries revealed in the Bible. The language used to describe the Body is particular and significant. Most commonly, when reference is made to the Body of Christ, the believers are presented as the Body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27) or as members of His Body (Eph. 5:30), and Christ is presented as the Head (4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19). However, in 1 Corinthians 6:15 the believers' bodies are presented as members of Christ, and in 1 Corinthians 12:12 Christ is presented as the Body. This article explores some of the language and terminology used in describing the Body of Christ in the Greek New Testament.

The Members of the Body of Christ Being Christ

The Greek word for members *melos* occurs six times in the New Testament to refer to the believers in relation to the Body of Christ. The believers are members of the Body of Christ (Eph. 5:30), members (of the Body of Christ) individually (1 Cor. 12:27), members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15, 2 times), and members one of another (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). The word *melos* is used very frequently in classical Greek for a musical member of a song or harmony or a phrase which is part of a composition, as well as for the members of a physical body. Its meaning emphasizes the importance of each part and the harmony among the parts in the whole, whether a musical piece, a composition, or the body.

The expression in 1 Corinthians 6:15 that our physical bodies are members of Christ is striking. Paul does not say, "You are members of *the Body of Christ*" but "Your bodies are members of Christ." One way to understand this genitive expression *of Christ* is to understand it as a possessive; i.e., the believers' physical bodies are members belonging to Christ. Of course, this possession, according to the illustration of the physical body, is an inalienable possession. Yet there is also a deeper significance to the genitive phrase here. Just as we would say to someone who stood on our foot, "You hurt *me!*" so one is inalienably identified with the members of one's body, which have the same life and nature. By virtue of our spiritual union with Christ,

mentioned in verse 17, there is a sense that even our physical bodies have become members of Christ (cf. Acts 9:4-5). On the one hand, this has a future fulfillment at the end of the process of transformation and redemption (Rom. 8:23), when our mortal bodies will be delivered from all the by-products of the fall and fully express Christ; on the other hand, there is also a present application. We need to present our bodies a living sacrifice (12:1) and present our members to sanctification (6:19). Our bodies also need to be preserved complete without blame (1 Thes. 5:23). Our physical bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19); they serve as a vessel for the pneumatic Christ to have an ongoing, continual expression on this earth.

This is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 12:12, where Paul uses the analogy of our physical body with its many members to show that Christ is a Body consisting of many members, just as all the members of the body are one body. He is both a member (as the Head) and also the whole Body. As Robertson and Plummer indicate in their commentary on 1 Corinthians, "From one point of view Christ is the Head, but that is not the thought here. Here He is the whole Body, as being that which unites the members and makes them an organic whole....The human body is a unique illustration of unity in diversity" (271). Just as the members of our human body, by virtue of being constituent parts of our body, are ourselves; so also Christ *is* all the members as well as *in* all the members (Col. 3:11; cf. Acts 9:4-5). Just as Paul could say Christ is the Body, so also we can say the Body is Christ.

By virtue of their oneness with Christ (1 Cor. 6:17) and their status of being in (*en*) Christ (Rom. 8:1) and Christ being in them (v. 10; 2 Cor. 13:5) through believing (Gal. 2:16) and being baptized into (*eis*) Christ (3:27; Rom. 6:3), the believers have become members of Christ and even have become Christ in life and nature but not in terms of His unique position and function as the Head of the Body.

This is further strengthened by 1 Corinthians 12:27: "You are the body of Christ, and members individually." The phrase *members individually* (Gk., *melē ek merous*) literally means *members out of the parts* or *portions*. While this refers to the assigning of each part to its place or position in the Body, the word *merous* (parts or portions), which is related to the word *merizō* (*apportion*, cf. Rom. 12:3, a measure of

faith; 2 Cor. 10:13), also indicates that the members are by constitution according to (lit. out of) the part or portion (of Christ) which God has apportioned or measured (cf. Eph. 4:7, 16) to each member.

Being Tempered Together to Become a Joint Body and Members One of Another

The Body of Christ is more than just the sum of isolated members. These members of Christ are not only joined to Christ the Head but are also fellow members of the Body (Gk., *sussōma*, Eph. 3:6) and members one of another. The word *sussōma* translated “fellow members of the Body” literally means “a joint body” or “a body (*sōma*) together (*sun*).” A number of verbs¹ are used particularly in 1 Corinthians 12 to indicate how these members are joined together to form the one Body. In this chapter Paul applies the illustration of a human body to the reality of the Body of Christ. First, the believers have been *baptized* (immersed) in one Spirit into the one Body and *given to drink* (Gk., *potizō*²—watered, saturated, imbued, used for irrigating lands) one Spirit (v. 13). This indicates “that the Spirit is both within and all around believers....It is this experience of the Spirit that incorporates people into the Christian community” (Talbert 84). God has *placed* (*titheimi*) certain gifted members in the church (v. 28), just as He has placed the members in the physical body (v. 18), and He also has *given* these gifted members to the Body (Eph. 4:11). The most significant verb which indicates a finer joining occurs in 1 Corinthians 12:24: “God has blended the body.” This refers to “the combining of the members of the human body into an organic structure” (Vine 620). The verb *blend* (*sugkerannumi*) is a compound of *sun* (together) and *kerannumi* which means to mix, mingle, blend together, temper by mixing. It occurs only twice in the New Testament—here and in Hebrews 4:2, where it refers to the word being mixed with faith. *Kerannumi* is used to describe the mixing of wine (Rev. 14:10; 18:6), the mixing of water to an agreeable temperature, the tempering of metals, and the tempering and regulating of climates, minds, and music. In reference to the members of a body, it carries the notion not only of blending the members together, but also of a regulated, balanced, harmonious order that is the result of this blending.

This blending together results in such an intimate union between the members that they not only have the same care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25) but are even described as being members *one of another* (Gk., *allēlōn*—Eph. 4:25; Rom. 12:5). The physical members of our body are members one of another by virtue of being joined to the same body and by sharing the same life, which is transmitted by the circulation of blood throughout the body. In the Body of Christ the members are joined to the same Body, share the same life of Christ, and enjoy the circulation of that life which the Bible calls fellowship (Gk., *koinōnia*—cf. 1 John

1:1-3), and this fellowship is with one another (*allēlōn*—v. 7). The use of the reciprocal pronoun *allēlōn* in the New Testament is quite enlightening. It occurs mostly in the writings of Paul,³ and the verbs used with it reveal a very intimate relationship in mutuality between the members of the Body as practiced in the early church life. The believers in Christ have been brought into a mystical, organic union with Christ the Head. Through this union they are members of Christ and have been blended together with the other members of the Body of Christ to such an extent that they become members one of another.

by Roger Good

Notes

¹All these verbs are aorist indicatives in Greek. They are interspersed among present tense forms and function as the basis for the description of the Body in the present tense (which describes the relationship and view the members should have toward one another). Hence, from God’s perspective, the actions of baptizing, giving to drink, placing, giving, and blending have taken place in the production of the Body. On the one hand, these verbs indicate that the formation of the Body of Christ, consisting of all the believers regardless of time and space, is an accomplished reality. However, this reality needs to be worked out and experienced by the believers in practicality. The ongoing process of the joining together of the members of the Body is emphasized by the durative nature of the present participles *being joined* and *knit together* in Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 2:19.

²This verb is best understood as an ingressive aorist indicating the inception of the action of drinking. As Witness Lee states in footnote 13⁵ in the Recovery Version:

To be baptized in the Spirit is to get into the Spirit and to be lost in Him; to drink the Spirit is to take the Spirit in and to have our being saturated with Him. By these two procedures we are mingled with the Spirit. To be baptized in the Spirit is the initiation of the mingling and is once for all. To drink the Spirit is the continuation and accomplishment of the mingling and is perpetual, forever.

³It is also used in the expression *love one another* which occurs fourteen times in John’s writings.

Works Cited

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