

# G L O S S A

## Members of the Body of Christ

In the previous issue of *A & C*, we considered the particular language used in describing the believers as members of the Body of Christ, the corporate Christ. The Body of Christ is a reality, rather than just a metaphor, and our human body serves as a physical illustration of Christ's mystical Body. In this article we will continue to consider the language used to describe the Body of Christ, specifically in terms of the relationship between the members, which is maintained by the circulation of the divine life common to all the members (fellowship), the growth and building up of the Body through being fitted and knit together, and the coordinated functioning of the members.

### Circulation within the Body—Fellowship

Drawing from Paul's use of the human body as an illustration of Christ's mystical Body (1 Cor. 12:12), the circulation of blood in the human body can be compared to the fellowship among the members of Christ's Body. Just as the circulation of blood is the flow of life in the body (Lev. 17:11; Deut. 12:23), supplying nutrients to all the members of the body and linking the members together in an organic relationship, so fellowship is the circulation of the divine life of Christ which flows through the members of His Body, supplying and linking the members together in an organic relationship.

*Fellowship* (*koinōnia*) is an abstract noun coming from the verb *koinōneō*. It conveys the idea of having or doing in common (*koinos*), sharing, and taking part in a thing with another (Liddell and Scott 969). It occurs in a number of noun phrases in the New Testament and implies a joint participation or a common participation. According to the context of 1 John, the believers' fellowship is based on the divine, eternal life of God manifested in Christ and reported to the believers by the apostles; this becomes their common portion (1:1-3). The believers have been called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor. 1:9; cf. 1 John 1:3, 6); they have the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; cf. fellowship of spirit, Phil. 2:1) and the

fellowship of the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).<sup>1</sup> Fellowship also includes the fellowship of material things (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13), of the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10), of faith (Philem. 6), and is unto the furtherance of the gospel (Phil. 1:5).

According to 1 John this fellowship is both vertical—the fellowship of the apostles and the believers with the Father and the Son (1:3, 6)—and horizontal—the fellowship between the apostles and the believers (v. 3, cf. Acts 2:42) and among the believers themselves (1 John 1:7) (Panikulam 6). This is symbolized by the river of water of life in Revelation 22:1 which proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (vertical) and reaches all parts of the city (horizontal—Psa. 46:4).

This flow of life or fellowship supplies us with the riches of God's Son into whose fellowship we were called (1 Cor. 1:9) and who is now realized as the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; cf. John 14:17-18; 16:13). Hence, it is also the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14),<sup>2</sup> which has and is a bountiful supply (*epichorēgia*) to the members of the Body (Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:5). This bountiful supply also has vertical and horizontal aspects. Not only is this supply received by the members from God its source (vertical), but it also is shared with or ministered to others by the members of the Body (horizontal) by passing "through every joint of the rich supply" (Eph. 4:16).

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The fellowship is also seen in the believers' partaking of the elements of bread and wine, which symbolize the physical blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16) as the life of Christ given for the Body (John 6:53-54). Hence, it is called the fellowship of the blood and body of Christ. The Lord's table, from its inception at the end of the Lord's earthly ministry until the time the Lord Himself will again partake of the symbols anew in the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 26:29), symbolizes not only the supplying of the elements of God's judicial and organic salvation to the members of the Body of Christ but also the common participation or fellowship of all the

members of the Body of Christ in their organic relationship with Christ. This relationship with Christ and with one another transcends time and space. It unites all the believers, who are separated only by the constraints of time and space, into one mystical Body (1 Cor. 10:17). Just as the circulation of blood is vital to the members of the physical body so also the fellowship or joint participation of Christ as the Spirit by the believers, which is symbolized by partaking of the Lord's table, is vital to the members of Christ's spiritual Body.

Fellowship also includes the fellowship of material things. This has vertical and horizontal aspects as well. God supplies material things to His creatures, signified by the seed in 2 Corinthians 9:10. These material things are also supplied by members of the Body, particularly to those members of the Body in need (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13; cf. Acts 2:44; 4:32).

### Being Fitted and Knit Together—Growth

Although the members of the Body of Christ enjoy the supply of life through fellowship, there is a further need within the Body for growth unto maturity. Colossians 2:19 combines the idea of nourishment with growth, using the word *epichorēgō*—*being richly supplied* (cf. Phil. 1:19; Gal. 3:5).

Three crucial passages in the New Testament of similar structure speak of growth. Colossians 2:19 says, "Out from whom [the Head, Christ] all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." Ephesians 4:16 says, "Out from whom [the Head, Christ] all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love." Ephesians 2:21 says, "In whom [Christ, the cornerstone] all the building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." The latter two verses combine the physical illustrations of a human body and a building with the Body of Christ as the temple of God. In the first two verses *all the Body* is the subject, and in the last verses *all the building* is the subject. In the first and third verses, *grow* is the predicate, and in the second *causes the growth* is the predicate. These predicates are modified by adverbial participles, *being richly supplied and knit together*; *being joined together and being knit together*; and *being fitted together*; and by prepositional phrases indicating the means through which growth takes place.

Growth, like fellowship, has vertical and horizontal aspects. Westcott indicates, "The increase of the Church depends in part on the due development of its members, and in part on their harmonious combination" (64). The vertical aspect of the growth of the Body, related to the development

of its members, is with the growth or increase of God, which comes out of (*ek*) the Head (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:16) and is into (*eis*) the Head (v. 15). It focuses on Christ as the source, content, and goal of the growth.

The horizontal aspect of this growth, is related to the harmonious combination of the members. It is indicated particularly by two present participles translated *being joined together* (*sunarmologeō*) and *being knit together* (*sumbibazō*) in Ephesians 4:16. These present participles indicate that these actions occur simultaneously with the action of growing and perhaps are the means or cause of the action of growing. *Sunarmologeō* literally means *fitting* or *framed together*. It is a compound of the preposition *together* or *with* (*sun*) and the verb *fit* (*harmologeō*), which in turn, is a compound of the noun *joint* (*harmos*—related to the word *harmony* in English) and a derivative of the verb *legō*, which has, among other meanings, the meaning *to lay in order*, *arrange*, or *gather*. *Sunarmologeō* occurs only in Ephesians 4:16 and 2:21 where it is used in conjunction with building. It properly refers to and stresses the joining of the structure particularly at the crucial joints (*harmos*). *Sumbibazō*, which also occurs in Colossians 2:19, is a causal form of *sumbainō* (come together) and means *to bring together*. In its passive sense it means *to be put together*, *knit together*, or *framed*. Metaphorically, it also refers to persons and means *to bring to terms*, *to reconcile*, or *to bring about an agreement*. It refers more to the bringing together of all the elements of the body, especially filling in the gaps between the joints. In terms of the illustration of the human body, *sunarmologeō* refers to the putting together of the structure of either a body or a building (i.e., its skeleton with crucial organs), whereas *sumbibazō* refers to the knitting of the sinews, blood vessels, and flesh onto and over the skeleton and crucial organs. The process of being joined and knit together can refer to either the addition of new members or the closer joining together of existing ones.

### The Building Up of the Body—Functioning

Colossians 2:19 and Ephesians 4:16 also indicate that the growth comes through the proper functioning of the members of the Body. It occurs through (*dia*) the joints (*aphē*) and sinews (*sundesmoi*—Col. 2:19), and through (*dia*) every joint (*aphē*) of the rich supply according to (*kata*) the operation in the measure of each one part (Eph. 4:16). Alford states, "The joints are the points of union where the supply passes to the different members, and by means of which the body derives the supply by which it grows" (120). These joints refer to the gifts mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 and the parts refer to the saints in verse 12. In verses 11 and 12 the gifts perfect the saints to do the work of ministry, which is to build up the Body of Christ. These verses parallel verse 16, in which all the Body, consisting of the joints of the rich supply and the individual

parts, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself.

There are some difficulties in understanding how the prepositional phrases *through* (*dia*) *every joint of the rich supply* and *according to* (*kata*) *the operation in the measure of each one part* fit into the structure of Ephesians 4:16. Most translations and commentaries regard the prepositional phrase *through every joint of the rich supply* as modifying the participles being joined together and being knit together. The second prepositional phrase, *according to the operation in the measure of each one part*, is subsequently regarded as modifying everything preceding it. This means that the *being joined together* and *being knit together* take place primarily through *every joint of the rich supply* and only secondarily *according to the operation in the measure of each one part*.

An alternative reading in papyrus 46 ( $P^{46}$ ) is mentioned by F. F. Bruce in a note in his commentary on the phrase *according to the working*: “Gk. κατ’ ἐνέργειαν.  $P^{46}$  reads καὶ ἐνεργείας, which would have to be taken with the preceding phrase, as though the meaning were ‘adjusted and fitted together through the supply and functioning of every ligament, in the due measure of each several part’” (99). Although he prefers the accepted text, there are some good reasons for accepting the reading of  $P^{46}$  as original. Apart from the fact that  $P^{46}$  is one of the earliest witnesses to the text of Ephesians, dated to and perhaps even earlier than AD 200, the reading seems to make more sense in the context. According to the verse, the growth of the Body is caused<sup>3</sup> by all the Body. This is strengthened by the reading of  $P^{46}$  which indicates that the growth occurs through the functioning of two different categories of members who comprise the whole Body: through every joint of the rich supply and (*kai*)<sup>4</sup> through the operation in the measure of each one part. Moreover, the structure of verse 16 in  $P^{46}$  is the same as the sister verse in Colossians 2:19, where the preposition *dia* is followed by two noun phrases *joints* and *sinews* linked by *kai* (*and*). These noun phrases can be considered as equivalent to the phrases following *dia* in Ephesians 4:16. The same noun *joints* occurs in the first phrase in both verses. The second phrase *sinews*, which literally means *binding together* in reference to sinews, nerves, blood vessels, etc., which bind together, is parallel to *each one part*.

Therefore, growth comes not just *through* the functioning of the “joints of supply,” the gifts of verse 11, but is also *dependent on*, not just *according to*, the operation in the measure of each one part. Perhaps this reflects one of the reasons the Body of Christ has not yet been built up. *Each one part* must be raised up to properly function in coordination with the gifts given to the Body. Although the difference between the reading of  $P^{46}$  and the other Greek

manuscripts is fine, the reading of  $P^{46}$  puts the functioning of the joints of the supply on the same level as the functioning of each one part, whereas the other Greek manuscripts make more of a distinction between the relative importance of their functions.

For the building up of the Body of Christ, the members of Christ need to remain in the fellowship of the Body receiving spiritual nourishment and being organically related to one another; they need to grow by the increase of God, being joined together harmoniously; and they need to be brought into their proper function, either as a joint of supply or as an operating part. Regardless of a member’s place in the Body of Christ, every member should function and participate in the building up of the corporate Body of Christ.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Here we understand the genitive noun phrases following the noun *fellowship* (e.g., of the Son, of the Holy Spirit, and of the blood and body of Christ) as being objective genitives with the Son, the Holy Spirit, and the blood and body of Christ as the objects of the joint participation (1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; cf. Heb. 6:4; 1 Cor. 10:16).

<sup>2</sup>This is equivalent to 1 Corinthians 12:13. All the believers, who were baptized in one Spirit into one Body, were also given to drink one Spirit. The drinking of the one Spirit is the common participation of all the believers in the one Spirit.

<sup>3</sup>The verb *poiō* (*causes*) is in the middle voice, as opposed to the more common active voice form, strengthening the idea of the growth coming from the Body itself.

<sup>4</sup>The alternate reading can be explained by the graphic similarity of (*kai*) and (*kat*’).

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