

THE CHURCH WHICH IS HIS BODY

By T. Austin-Sparks

Chapter 1 – Its Heavenly Aspect

We are going, as the Lord enables us, to meditate afresh on the Body of Christ. We know, when we want to have the larger unfoldings of this "Mystery" where to turn; we instinctively turn to the Ephesian letter. In this letter we note, first of all, the simple preliminary fact, that the Church is designated "The Body of Christ," it is "the Church which is His Body." That distinguishes the Church in this letter from other designations which we find elsewhere. There is the Temple, there is the House of God, and other such-like designations, but in this letter it is particularly The Body of Christ that is basic to all that the letter unfolds, and what is contained in the letter is in line with the conception of a body. Now the word which seems to predominate through this letter in connection with that designation is the word translated "Together." It is impressive to note how frequently that word occurs. Here we are said to have been "quicken together" in Him. That does not only mean that our togetherness individually was with the Lord Jesus in His rising, but it means that we corporately were quickened, we were together quickened in Him, not only with Him but in Him corporately quickened.

The Eternal Oneness Of The Body

In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus the whole Church was included together. And then in the same verse, 2:6, we are said to be "raised together" in Him. Further, in the same place, we are said to be "seated together" in Him. Coming back a step into 1:10, we are "gathered together into one" and then on again to 2:21, we are "framed together." In verse 22 we are "build together." So this word "together" brings into view in a very simple way the fact of the corporate nature of the Church, the Body of Christ. We want to get the full force of that as far as it is possible, because this letter undoubtedly emphasizes the fact that the Church is a corporate Body; not that it one day will be when the work of grace is completed; not that it is merely that in the mind and thought of God, the will of God, the intention of God; not that it was intended to be when the Lord started it; but that it IS; that in spite of what is seen here on the earth; in spite of the ever-increasing number of divisions and separations, all the unhappy schisms which have entered into the fellowships of God's people on the earth, in spite of everything that ever has been and ever is or will be along that line, the Church is still a corporate whole.

It is that, not as to the people as on the earth, but it is true as to the essential nature of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the sooner we get that rooted and settled in our spiritual acceptance and consciousness the better. No schism, beloved, that is incidental to the relationships of Christian people on the earth can alter that fact. The differences which exist or which come about by the different mentalities, choices and preferences, likes and dislikes, intellectual acceptances or rejections; all those differences do not touch this ultimate fact that there is a realm in which there is a togetherness, a oneness, a corporateness which is unaffected by anything that is of man in himself religiously or theologically.

There is a realm of course in which there may be a breach of fellowship, that is where it enters into the realm of the spirit and where the spirit is affected. There you

may very definitely strike a blow at the Body of Christ, but ultimately this Body is one; which, of course, clearly indicates that this is something other than an earthly thing and that it is a heavenly Body, unaffected and untouched by earth.

We are inclined to accept what we see, to be affected by the divisions that are here, and are almost in despair because of what we see. The sooner we sweep that whole thing aside the better, and let there be fifty thousand earthly departments of Christian people, the Body of Christ remains one. It is a seamless robe, it is a Body which cannot be divided, it remains one. That is the basic fact to which we must come back, that is where we begin.

This letter, in which there is the unveiling of the mystery of Christ and His members, the Church, the one Body, states most emphatically the fact of the corporate nature of the Body. It does not argue about it, or discuss it, it takes it for granted, it is a settled thing. Of course there are degrees of enjoyment of it, and there are degrees of the fruitfulness of it as here, but there are no degrees of the fact of it. The fact remains as solid and settled. Our business is to enter into the settled fact and come into the meaning of it: but our not having come into the full meaning of it does not mean that it does not exist. The trouble is that we do not come into what God has established from the beginning; that is, we have to know what it is that makes the Body one, and that is our business. The unity exists; our business is to apprehend it, not make it. We go on to that almost immediately, but note, the Letter to the Ephesians is still alive, it is still applicable, it is still true for today. After all these centuries when we have all that we have on the earth, the departments and divisions of Christian people, all of whom may be members of the Body of Christ, still after all these centuries the Ephesian letter remains where it was at the beginning, and it represents the Body as a solid whole, a corporate unity.

A Heavenly Position Necessary To Apprehending The Oneness

It is only as we get up into the heavenlies and away from the earthlies that we begin to enter into that fact and realize what that fact means to God, to the heavenlies, to hell, and to this world. So, in order that we should enter into the fact with all that that fact contains of effective vocation and life, we have to introduce the whole matter by our position in Christ in the heavenlies, and see exactly where we are placed spiritually: for not until we come to recognize that and to enter into our heavenly position in Christ can we see, appreciate, or come into the meaning of this heavenly reality the Church, which is His Body. We cannot see the Church from the earthlies, we can only see it from the heavenlies.

Our Attitude Towards Differences

I do not want to pass away from that as having merely stated something. I do want that we should get the benefit of it. You and I may have a disagreement, but it makes no difference to our relationship in the Lord Jesus. The fact that you and I fall out or disagree does not tear us as limbs out of the Body of Christ. No, that is our loss, that is our shame, that is incidental in our Christian life, that is a breakdown somewhere in grace in us, but we shall recover ourselves from that if we yield to the movements of the Spirit in us, and come back to find that we have not to be rejoined in Christ in His Body, that fact remains.

You see the working principle is this: that there may be much amongst believers on this earth of division, but we have not to accept that as ultimate, we have not to take that as meaning that some are in Christ and some are out of Christ, that we are in Christ and others are not, and that the Body has altogether collapsed and disintegrated. The only hope of enjoying the fact is that we repudiate what looks like another fact, and we seek to get above that which, being earthly, brings these things about, and discover we are in the heavenlies, and fellowship abides. That is a working principle and we should recognize that is the meaning of the fact. We have got to accept the fact, and we have to seek to overcome or repudiate the other things which come in against the ultimate fact.

Chapter 2 – The Basis of Oneness

Now, seeing that it is set forth as being so, that we are together, we want to see something more of the ground of this oneness. I think perhaps we could be helped most by reminding ourselves of the 23rd chapter of Leviticus, the chapter which contains the establishing of the Feasts of the Lord. Now the main feature, the dominating feature of these feasts is that they represent the corporate life of the people of God, the corporate life of the Church. You see they are the gatherings together of all the Lord's people. These feasts are called holy convocations. The people are convoked, their oneness is revealed on these occasions and by these occasions, so that the primary element is the corporate life of the people of God as expressed at these times.

That is what is in view. That at these times people cease to live private lives, cease to live detached individual lives, even their own domestic lives or their own social lives within their own circle. All that which is departmental is abandoned at these times and the people are found as one. That being the case you proceed to take account of what it is that makes their oneness, and you see it is the feasts. Yes, but then it is the different kinds of feasts all put together making one whole which is the foundation of the corporate life and fellowship of the Lord's people.

So you go through the feasts. (I am not going to deal with them at large or in detail, I simply mention them and perhaps the outstanding feature of them). You begin with

The Feast Of The Passover

A great many Divine principles are gathered up in the Feast of the Passover, but there is one thing which embraces all the others and becomes that for which the Passover stands, that which it represents, that is, A COVENANT IN LIFE BY BLOOD. Everything is gathered up into that. God makes a covenant. He makes that covenant by blood; that blood of the covenant is deliverance from judgment and death, a holding in life when death is abroad in judgment, the destroyer rendered inoperative. Well, that is life triumphant in the presence of death, over the Devil, in the power of shed and sprinkled blood, and there is a covenant between God and His own. That is the first step, the first thing which brings into being the corporate life of God's people.

Now I want to discriminate. A great many people of today have tried, and are trying to realize the oneness of the Church upon the basis of the doctrine of the virtue and efficacy of the Blood of the Lord Jesus, the doctrine of the Blood; if you like - the atonement, the value of the Blood, the whole teaching of the Blood of the Lord Jesus from whatsoever angle it may be preached, in whatsoever direction it may be applied; they are trying to realize the oneness of the Church by establishing that as an essential doctrine, and if you accept that as one of the doctrines of the faith, then you come into the oneness of the Church. But never yet has doctrine been able to realize oneness. It is not sufficient that you have fundamentalism, which after all may only be the gathering together of certain recognized fundamental doctrines; it is not enough to have that as the basis of unity. It does not work, you cannot get it on the basis of doctrine, on the basis of creed, you have got to have it on the basis of experience, on the basis of power, of something wrought, something brought about. We know that there are plenty of people who believe in all the eternal and infinite virtue and value of the Blood of the Lord Jesus who know very little experimentally about the power of His Blood in their lives as a mighty force working against the power of death within and without. That is a heavenly thing, but creed can be quite an earthly thing, perfectly sound and true, but quite an earthly thing for an earthly society, not efficacious in the spiritual realm.

It is the spiritual power of the Blood as registered in the spiritual universe that is the true value of the Blood, and it is when you come into that that you come into the true oneness of the Church - spiritual, not creedal. It is experimental, not doctrinal. It is life as an active, energetic, mighty thing. It is not our loyalty to sound doctrine. It is very important to notice that distinction. The maintenance of the oneness of the Body of Christ, beloved, requires something infinitely more than a sound creed and true doctrine; it needs a power, a terrific power, a force mightier than any other force in this universe, and the Blood is that.

It is on the ground of that Blood that the Church has been brought into being. Christ now lives in virtue of His own Blood, and He, living in virtue of that has brought all His members into heavenly fellowship with Him by the same virtue of His Blood. It is a living, working, operating thing this Blood, and the Passover is just that we have come into an experimental, living, active union with one another in Christ in the power of His Blood in that covenant. That is the oneness of the Church, the Body of Christ. Until something of that operates we have not come into the active operation of the Church's life as a heavenly Body.

If the Church is going to count, fulfil her vocation, register her impact upon the principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wickedness, and accomplish her universal mission, her pre-destined purpose, it can only be on the basis of this tremendous power that is in the precious Blood of the Lord Jesus. That being true, the Church has no existence apart from that Blood, and therefore no vocation apart from the Blood.

We have said we have got to come into an appreciation of it, to approximate to what is already true; but in the mind of God no one is a member of Christ's Body who does not stand right in all the virtue of His precious Blood. I do not mean that they intelligently apprehend all the meaning of that Blood, that they have come into the full revelation of what that Blood is, but that their relationship to the Lord Jesus is brought about in virtue of that Blood, and that in heaven it is the Blood that has joined them to Him and one another. It is in the power of that that the Church is

going to be ultimately triumphant. "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11).

That is just the beginning, you see. So if we are going to know, appreciate, enjoy and profit by the corporate truth of the Body of Christ, we have got to learn what the power of the Blood is, and that Blood has got to become a recognized force in our lives against the things which the Devil seeks to use for breaking up fellowship. Oh, how much less there might have been of Satanic success along the line of schism and division if only the Lord's people had recognized the power and virtue of the Blood against all such Satanic activity! If you and I came into a state of strain in our relationships as the result of some work of the enemy, beloved, the only thing that will bring us back into fellowship is the pleading of the power of the Blood against all that the enemy has done. That itself is full proof of the fact that the Body is one in virtue of the Blood initially, continually and finally. The Passover yields that primary truth, so the coming together of the Lord's people in the Old Testament, their corporate life, their fellowship, was in the first place upon a basis of a covenant in the blood as triumphant over death and the destroyer, the first phase of their fellowship. The second of these feasts was

The Feast Of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be continued for seven whole days, representing a perfect period, a perfect spiritual period - (seven is the number of spiritual perfection) - that is a perfect spiritual period throughout which all that is of the flesh is eliminated and ruled out, for the leaven is the ferment of the flesh, is the work of the flesh, the potent element of the flesh which is corrupt, and we know that it is the leaven which is the basis of corruption. The flesh is corrupt, the flesh has got to be eliminated, ruled out throughout the whole period of spiritual life. We have to come to Romans 6, and see in the Cross of the Lord Jesus the body of the flesh put out of operation, where we recognize that this flesh is by God ruled out. The Lord demands that it shall be set aside, we must repudiate it, we must accept God's position about this, that the flesh must not have a place. It does not mean that we shall never be tempted along the line of the flesh, nor that we shall never be conscious that the flesh is there, but it does mean that we have to repudiate the flesh even though we might be touched by it; we have to take back that ground and repudiate it and say, "I repent, I put that back, I recognize that is corruption and that will corrupt everything, and I put it down, I put it out. I reckon myself dead to it." Just as on the eve of the Passover the father of the Jewish household would light his lamp and go through the house room by room, searching in every corner, every cupboard, every out of the way place to find any leaven if he could, and having swept his house clean of leaven so far as he knew by the most thorough search, even then before God he was not satisfied, he would make the declaration, "I have searched my house, I have purged it of the leaven which I know, but if there should yet be some leaven which has eluded my utmost search and scrutiny, I repudiate it also."

The thoroughness of the repudiation of the flesh as the corrupting element, that is the feast of unleavened bread. The Oneness of the Church the Body of Christ demands that not only our sins should have been put away, but that we should have been put away in the flesh. The natural man corrupts things, spoils things, divides. We know it is the ferment of the flesh that works against the unity of the Body, brings about schisms, upsets the positive spiritual functioning of the Lord's people in

spiritual oneness. It is the flesh that does it all; so that when all the people are going to express their oneness of life in God it is necessary for them to repudiate the flesh, to get rid of the leaven. Any slight uprising of jealousy, or envy, or personal feeling, or heat of myself, or provocation which is personal provocation, not on a basis of principle, righteousness, but personal provocation which casts a shadow between me and another, I have got to go back on that at once and with all my heart I have got to say, "That was wrong and I repent of it and seek to have that leaven extracted, put aside."

We have all got to do that. We are still in this natural life susceptible to being upset and offended, we are still very touchy. Oh, yes, we know it quite well! Whether we feel we have a right to be upset or not, that is not the question, the thing is has our flesh come into the situation? If it has it has put up a barrier between us and others, and we must go and confess the fault of which we were guilty. Not all the time excusing ourselves because we were more wronged than wrong, nor hiding our own wrong because they were wrong. We must go back and say, "I ought not to have reacted as I did to it, I ought to have sought grace to return good for evil." We do not always do that, not any of us; but unless we do that, unless we keep short accounts there is going to rise up a barrier between us.

The Body of Christ in its corporate oneness is based upon the working fact of Romans 6 and Colossians 2:11-12, the whole body of the flesh circumcised, put away. You see again how necessary it is to have something more than the principle of our identification with Christ in death; it has got to be, not the principle, but the active working of the principle. The principle probably does not do anything other than put us into a false position, and it will do so if it is not applied. We can be just as deluded by truth as we can be by error. Quite a lot of people are deluded by truth. They have the principle, they have the doctrine, and for them that is the end of everything; they do not see that what is necessary is that the principle should operate and that it should be life. You see that the corporate life of Israel was based upon this second thing the putting away of the flesh. The third of the feasts was

The Feast Of The First-Fruits

Now that embraces many aspects of truth and leads on to much more than at present we have it in mind to mention. We just take the primary thing, the initial thing, the outstanding thing which governs everything else in these feasts. When you come to the Feast of the First-fruits, you are simply coming to the great truth of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as representative. The first ripe fruits represent all the other to follow, the first-fruits are taken in representation of the whole. The priest takes those first ripe ears of corn to the Lord and thanks the Lord for the whole harvest. These are the earnest of the harvest, and we know from "Corinthians" what the Apostle says about this, that the Lord Jesus is a First-fruits, so that He is in His own Person representatively the Church in resurrection. "We are risen together with Him," says "Ephesians." We have been buried with Him, that is the old man put away, now we are risen with Him, and the real oneness of the members of Christ, the oneness of the Body of Christ is found in its living testimony to resurrection union with the Lord Jesus. We know how He established that principle in His simple and well-known little parable of the grain of wheat. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:24). You see there is a multiplication, a hundred-fold. One corn dying issues in a hundred corns living. It is resurrection corporeity in Christ through His death.

Oh that we should enter into the working force of that as the Body of Christ; and you know when we really do begin to enter experimentally and livingly into the fact that we were planted together with Him in the likeness of His resurrection, and the power of His resurrection is operative in us, what a sense of fellowship that brings to us, what a difference in our relationships. If we are knowing the power of resurrection life at work in us, what fellowship we have. If we know something mutually of life triumphant over death, a working thing in us, a mutuality in experience, that mutuality is going to count, and it already is a testimony in the heavenlies, it is working against the forces of death and darkness.

That thing wrought into the Body of Christ is the testimony to the fact that the power of the Devil is broken, and a testimony to the fact that Christ has overcome death and has swallowed up death in victory (1 Cor. 15:54; Hos. 13:14). Unless we know that experimentally in the spiritual realm we shall not know it in the physical. The physical always follows the spiritual in the Divine order. We will never know resurrection of the body unto eternal life unless we know already resurrection in the spirit. It is a working force that constitutes the very basis of the existence of the Church's activity and function. To enter into the fact of the oneness of the Body we have got to enter into the experience of the power of resurrection. The fourth is

The Day Of Atonement

As in all the others, there are many principles included, but one thing predominates. The Lord says, "It is a Sabbath of rest unto you, ye shall do no work." This is a feast of gathering together of the Lord's people into rest, the Day of Atonement. Now, leaving all the other elements, let us notice the significance of the Sabbath rest coming in at this point. The feasts have been already introduced with the establishment of the Sabbath; here the Sabbath rest comes in in a special, peculiar, particular place in connection with the Day of Atonement, and it says this to us; that on the basis of our covenant union with God in life triumphant over death by the Blood shed and sprinkled, on the basis of our old man having been crucified with Christ, the body of the flesh put away, on the basis of our having come into the knowledge of union with Christ risen, the power of His resurrection, we enter into rest. We enter into rest; we come to an end of our works and enter into God's Sabbath, God's rest; we come to the place where we no longer strive after an end but where we have reached the end, where struggling to satisfy God ceases, and God is satisfied. He looks upon His works perfectly satisfied, we come into God's satisfaction.

In this Day of Atonement, in the atoning work of the Lord Jesus and the atoning value of His Blood sprinkled on the mercy seat right in the presence of God, God has found an answer to all His desires and requirements and has come to His rest, full satisfaction in His Son. That Blood is taken into the presence of God as a testimony to the fact that all is done and finished and God rests in the full accomplishment of the Lord Jesus, through His Blood, and there is no more striving. When we come there, to the apprehension of the perfect work of the Lord Jesus in His atonement we ought to come to rest. All fretful care to satisfy God ought to be put aside and we ought to find Christ meeting all our need for us before the Father.

What about our progressive sanctification? Is there nothing to be done of that in us? Yes, but you will never progressively move into perfection, holiness, until that basis is fully settled, the Lord Jesus has presented everything for you for the satisfaction of

the Father. We grow in grace on the basis that already Christ has accomplished the whole work for us and we have nothing that we can do to add to His work for our sanctification.

Luther was sent to Rome with a commission and he was very anxious to visit the City and that special place of penance that he might get special privileges and indulgences and so on by climbing those stairs on his hands and knees. He thought by imposing upon himself that terrible suffering he would find the rest of justification. He started, the thing became laborious and something said, "The just shall live by faith," and on he went again; the voice said again, "The just shall live by faith," and he tried more steps; the emphasis came back again upon one word, "The just shall LIVE by faith" (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38), and that was what led to his conversion and his abandonment of the whole Romish system of justification by works.

"The just shall LIVE by faith." It is not our faith as something in itself, it is the Object of our faith, the work of the Lord Jesus. We make far too much of the measure of our faith, it is the Object of our faith. It is when we get our faith fastened upon the Object, Christ and His perfect work for us, that we enter into rest. We climb no more stone steps on hands and knees. This is a basic thing to the corporate life of the Lord's people. The element of unrest, ferment, dissatisfaction goes out, and we have peace with God, we have got harmony, for that is only another word for peace. That is rest. Peace in the Bible is not some sort of atmosphere, but a right adjustment of all elements to one another in a perfect harmony.

The last of these feasts is

The Feast Of Tabernacles

And how proper is their order. You see how their sequence is just right when you come to the Feast of Tabernacles. You notice that the people during their time of convocation are called upon to leave their houses and come out and go and cut down boughs of trees and build themselves booths and dwell in these booths outside their houses throughout the whole of the time of the feasts. It is a corporate action, and if you will just follow through the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament into the Book of Nehemiah you will find that it points backward, and in the case of the remnant where the Feast of Tabernacles was reinstated there is a distinct link made between that reinstating and Israel's coming out of Egypt (Lev. 23:42-43).

It is said that this Feast of Tabernacles is meant to perpetuate the memory of Israel's coming out of Egypt, and yet when they came out of Egypt there was no Feast of Tabernacles established. The Feast of Tabernacles is the means of perpetuating the memory of Exodus. They came out of stone houses, directly related to the earth, they came out into a wilderness where everything was not earthly, everything was heavenly. Heavenly symbols - the blue robe of the High Priest and the bit of the same blue on the border of the garment of every man, woman and child throughout all their generations. So heavenliness was the character of these people, they were not of this earth, but out for God unto the heavenlies, and the Feast of Tabernacles speaks of the heavenliness of the people of God.

Beloved, that is an important basic factor of the Church which is His Body. We were saying that God in this dispensation is doing nothing whatever publicly to constitute

something on this earth, and yet men are striving as hard as they can to set up something on this earth for God.

There at the end of the second century of this Christian era, perhaps before that, this thing came in, and there were means and methods adopted to make the Church something on this earth, to organize it as a world force, to put it into such form that it would appeal to men and impress men of this world, so that the world would take account of it, and say it was a great force, and something that cannot be ignored. That has developed and has ever been an absolute violation of the principle of God for this whole dispensation. What God is doing is building a heavenly Church, a Body in the heavens, and the Church of God is not a thing seen, it is a thing unseen, a secret people, spiritual, by the world unknown - it knew Him not (John 1:10).

That is basic to our oneness. Immediately there is a tendency to set up something here on the earth you will get divisions; it does not matter how spiritual it is, immediately it touches the earth you will get divisions. Some of the most beautiful movements of God, really God's movement from heaven, immediately they get into the hands of men and become something on the earth, division comes in and you get more sects.

The only safety is to keep off the earth, the only safety is to recognize what God is doing. There will be a testimony here in the world, but there is a difference between there being a testimony in the world and there being an organization in the world.

The Lord is out of sympathy with every movement to set up something here on the earth. He will do that in a coming age, but not in this. If we do things by way of setting up something here on the earth, even for God, it is not long before the Lord leaves us to take the responsibility for it, the Lord will not take the responsibility for that. He will take responsibility for all that is according to His own mind in this age, that which is absolutely heavenly.

Chapter 3 – The Nature of the Body of Christ

We now proceed to consider the nature of the corporate life of the Church, and we want to note first of all one or two quite elementary facts which, nevertheless, always carry a freshness of meaning to those who are spiritually alive to the Lord, and the first simple truth is this, that the term, the designation "The Body of Christ," is peculiar to the Apostle Paul. Other designations of the Church are found before Paul's day and in other parts of the Scriptures outside of the writings of Paul, but the title, "The Body of Christ," "The Body," "The Church, which is His Body," is peculiar to Paul. The Church was not a new idea at all. The Lord's people were familiar with that title. The Lord Jesus had spoken of His Church to the Apostles. There was nothing new in that, but when you come to speak of that Church as "The Body of Christ," it is an entirely new idea, a new thought, a new conception bringing with it an entirely new presentation of the nature of this thing. It says very emphatically and forcefully and clearly that the Church, as regarded by God, is not just a community; it is not a congregation, it is not something denominational, or interdenominational, or even undenominational.

And yet you may use the term "Church" and have a mentality encircling that term which conceives of the Church as a community of Christian people, a Christian society, a company of people on the earth of mutual interest in the things of Christ. But this designation carries things into an altogether different realm. It is a body. Not a body of people, but that which is represented and illustrated by the physical body of a man. I do not mean that the Church is the physical body of Christ, do not misunderstand, but that the physical body of a man is taken as an illustration of what the Church is. (Christ still has His own personal and separate being and spiritual body in glory).

No Such Thing As A Local "Body"

Now another factor in the truth of the Body of Christ is that there is no such thing as a local body. There are local churches, or local assemblies, but there is no such thing as a local Body. That is made clear in one passage at least when rightly translated - 1 Corinthians 12:27 - where the unfortunate translation of some of our versions is "Ye are the body of Christ." In the Greek there is no article there, it does not say, "Ye are the body of Christ," but "Ye are Christ's body." That gives an entirely different complexion to the local assembly. This word spoken to a local company of believers at Corinth most clearly implies that the part is the whole in implication, that the local body is the whole in representation, the whole body is represented by that local company. Now that need not be so in the case of local assemblies or local churches, but you cannot localize the Body of Christ in that way. That is, you cannot cut off so many members of a physical frame and put them in one corner and call that the body. Wherever members of Christ are, there in implication and representation the whole Body of Christ is, and the Lord's mind is that every local company shall be a living representation of the whole Body, a microcosm of the whole Body of Christ. What is true of the whole Body has got to be true there, because they are not a detached company, not an isolated or separated assembly, there by implication the whole Body is. That embraces - whether you are able to grasp it or not - all the great elements and factors of the Body of Christ.

It says quite clearly that nothing in the thought of God is local, departmental, separate or independent. In the thought of God everything to do with His Church is universal, relative, interdependent; the Church is one. It is saying that you are so vitally related to other believers that you are the Body of Christ in implication, in effect, in nature. It declares most emphatically that the part is the whole in the thought of God, and is to be regarded as the whole. Let us put it this way.

Here are we in this place in this part of this city, a company of the Lord's people, and vitally related to this company here is the whole Body of Christ. We are not a detached or separate company, an independent assembly, we are in a living, functioning spiritual union with every other member of the Body of Christ in this whole world wherever they may be. France, Switzerland, Germany, Poland, America, Africa, China, India, etc., they are all here in the relativity of the Body of Christ, and all involved in our gathering together. We have to see that more fully presently, but when once that principle is spiritually apprehended then we have got our feet on the way of our universal ministry. Whenever we gather together, even as two or three, the whole Body is gathered with us in the heavenlies and is affected by our gathering together. It is tremendous to think that two or three of the children of God gathered in one place anywhere, in living touch with the Head, are affecting and can affect,

the whole Body of Christ; every member, however many millions there may be, so that they are in effect the Body of Christ.

Now how does that come to you? Does it reach you, or is it so familiar that you say that you know all about that? It is necessary to place fresh emphasis upon it from time to time.

The Body - Christ's Complement

Now further, the Church as the Body is the complement and fullness of Christ, associated with Him as Head over all things, the complement of Christ, completion of Christ, the fullness of Christ. We are in Ephesians, you know, and here the Church, the Body is "the fullness of Him that filleth all in all," the Church is said to be the fullness of Him. Associated with Him as Head over all things. To illustrate: while unrevealed, while still a mystery held from the ages and generations, the Body truth in principle is contained in the Word right from the beginning. It had never been specifically unveiled or mentioned but it is there. Truths are eternal, and from the very beginning you have a principle of the Body represented and illustrated in the case of Adam and Eve. The woman was taken out of the man and then brought to the man to complete him, and that is the Church, that is the Body of Christ; taken out of Christ and then brought to Christ to complete Him. His completion, His complement unto His fullness associated with Him as Head. "As the man is the head of the woman so Christ is the Head of the Church," associated with Him as Head over all things. We will take that up again presently for its practical outworking.

Let us note still further, the Word of the Lord reveals the Church as complete in the mind of God at any given time. This is never dealt with in tenses in the Word of God, that is, past, present and future. It is always complete in the present tense, in the mind of God. The Lord never talks about the Church when it will be complete; the Lord never talks about the completing of the Church in a future time. You have such phrases as these, "The whole Body," that is a declaration now, as though in Paul's day, when he wrote that phrase, the Body was complete; he is speaking *NOW* about the whole Body. "All the Body fitly framed," speaking in his own day. You have either got to decide that it was only the saints in Paul's day who made up the Body of Christ, or ruling that out and admitting believers after Paul's day, you have to come to this conclusion that in the thought of God as expressed by the Holy Spirit in these words the Body is complete in any given time. That takes you back to the Ephesian word to the "before times eternal" when God completed the Body in His own mind, "whom He foreknew, He predestinated." Back there in eternity the thing was complete, and that completeness *IN THE MIND* of God exists at any time and every time.

Then we go on to note that the Body is for the display of Christ. Just as a man expresses himself through his body, so Christ expresses Himself through His Body, and the Body's supreme and all inclusive function is for the display of Christ.

The Holy Spirit: The Unifying Factor In The Body

Now as to the great unifying factor in the Body of Christ. What is the unifying factor in the Body of Christ? It is not a mutual acceptance of certain truths presented. That does not constitute the Body of Christ. It is not that we all agree to believe certain doctrines. The unifying factor of the Body of Christ is the Holy Spirit. "We were all

baptized in one Spirit into one Body" (I Cor. 12:13). "There is one Body and one Spirit" (Eph. 4:4). Individually we have each a spirit, a separate spirit. The Body of Christ has only one Spirit and that is the factor which makes the Body one.

Now you can clearly and immediately see how, out of that, many practical issues proceed. The necessity, for instance, for receiving the Holy Spirit. That is very elementary, I know, but it is a foundational fact. Our "Churchmanship" is tested on that truth. Have we received the Holy Spirit? But then the fact is not enough, the function is necessary; and for the Body to function, it is not only necessary that the members should receive the Holy Spirit, but that the Holy Spirit should have His full place in every member. His full place! The Body can only function when the Spirit has His full place, His complete place given Him in each member.

Now the order of things, not chronologically but spiritually, is very clear in the arrangement of the New Testament. Romans precedes Corinthians, and Corinthians precedes Ephesians, and necessarily so. Romans brings in the Cross specifically for the setting aside of the natural man. Corinthians has as its objective, its stress, its note, the place of Christ in absolute Lordship. All the trouble at Corinth was because the Lord Jesus was not in His place as Sovereign Head, as Lord; and the word of the Apostle is "We proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord." They were making men lords - Paul, Apollos, Peter; they were putting men in the place of the Lord Jesus. They were putting things in the place of the Lord Jesus, even the spirituals, they were not giving Him His right place as absolute Sovereign Head, and the letter was brought in for that purpose. Romans to set aside the natural man, Corinthians to bring Christ into His place as Lord; then Ephesians can come in and you have, as constructed upon those two principles - the natural man set aside, the Lord Jesus established as Lord - the Body presented and functioning upon that two-fold basis.

You cannot have an expression of the Body of Christ until the natural man has been set aside. The uprising of the natural man in any way or measure violates the whole Body of Christ, and is a positive antagonism to the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. The flesh cannot have a place in the Body of Christ if the Body of Christ is to be what the Lord conceives it should be. If it is to function, the Lord Jesus must be absolutely Lord in the case of every believer.

So that is the order, and then, beloved, the Spirit's method is again revealed in His wisdom in following that up by Colossians. Chronologically Colossians comes before, spiritually after, Ephesians. Colossians is the full inheritance in Christ, the fullness of God is vested in Christ, He is the sum total of all the Divine fullness. Colossians is the New Testament counterpart of the Book of Joshua. Christ is the inheritance. He is the land of promise flowing with milk and honey, the land of riches and wealth. He is all that, and you come into the fullness of Christ as the Body on the ground of His having become Lord, and the flesh, the natural man having been set aside. That is the Body of Christ in its nature. Apply those laws today and you will get a living expression of what is in Ephesians. The reason why we have no, or such little, expression of what is in Ephesians today, the Body mightily functioning in the heavenlies, is because the natural man has not been ruled out, because Christ is not in His place as absolute Lord.

Therefore, what is basic in the first instance to the Church, the Body of Christ, and to the revelation of the Body of Christ, is the practical outworking of the Cross. We shall never, by the Lord, be led to see the Body of Christ until we have been led to see

Romans, especially Romans 6, until there has been a revelation to us of the Cross. I do not mean a presentation of the principle of the Cross, but a revelation of the Cross. Now probably in quite a number of cases that has been borne out.

Speaking for one's self, one preached Romans 6 for years, one preached the message of the Cross in fullness for years, as truth, as Scripture, and you could never find a flaw with the doctrine of the Cross as then preached. But then the practical application of it had not come about, and the time came when the Lord confronted one with the implications of Romans 6, and it was as though one knew nothing of Romans 6 when confronted with the real meaning of it, for the thing was so drastic, so terrific that it nearly knocked one off one's feet, and slew one. Such a difference between the doctrine of the Cross and the applying of it. When that was got through and worked in we came to see that the Lord had included us in the death of Christ, not only as sinners, but as men with every bit of our natural equipment, our natural facility, even to preach the Gospel (which was a natural facility to preach), and all those things which were employed in Christian service as our resources, the whole range, intellectual and every other realm. The Lord brought us to see that all was included in the death of Christ and that all things have to be out from Himself in the new creation (that is the law of the servant of the Lord, as the Lord Jesus Himself said, "I do nothing of Myself" (John 5:19), everything now out from God, a life of total dependence upon Him for everything) when that was applied in a practical way it meant a tremendous upheaval and for a time it was death to everything, it was the end.

Now that is true to our experience, but when that was got through, when that in principle was established - not that there has been no more of the Cross applied since, for it is always being applied - when the Lord had the thing so registered that for evermore we recognized the necessity for the natural man to be kept out, then after a while the Lord began to reveal the great truth of the Body. We had preached on the Church, which is His Body, for years, had been of an interdenominational spirit and frame of mind where we regarded all believers as members of the one Church, the one great spiritual community, had studied Ephesians most thoroughly. But when the thing began to break as a revelation from heaven it was as though we knew nothing about it at all, and the practical outworking was tremendous as to cause again another revolution, for the teaching which before never raised practical issues in certain realms now began to raise these.

For instance, with the teaching apart from the revelation, the denominational issue was never raised at all; when the revelation came it was found impossible to be a denominationalist. It was not a mental attitude taken, but one had come into a spiritual position where one was out of the whole thing and it was a contradiction to go on in that thing when one was out of it. I am illustrating, not applying this to you as teaching and saying that the teaching of the Body of Christ demands that you shall leave a denomination. The revelation may put you into another position, but don't you move out on mere doctrine, or because of what I say. Stay where you are until you get a revelation which makes it impossible for you to remain. Revelation raises practical issues while doctrine may not do so in the same way. We need more than the apprehension of Bible truth with our natural minds, for many minds have many different apprehensions.

We were saying what is foundational to the Body of Christ is a revelation and application of the Cross, for when the natural man of the flesh is ruled out, put aside,

smitten, then you see the way is paved for true spiritual apprehension of the Body of Christ because the Body of Christ cannot exist and function with any natural man about. That is the nature of the Body of Christ. The natural man is put out altogether, so again let us resay that the revelation of the Body is based upon *A REVELATION* and *AN APPLICATION* of the Cross. Then the Body becomes the sphere of the Holy Spirit's activity. The little phrase is in 1 Corinthians 12, "As He wills," He appoints, He gives gifts, He equips, as He wills, implying the complete liberty, the unrestricted liberty of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is restricted, in that measure the Body is limited in its realization of the Divine calling and the fulfilment of the Divine purpose of its existence. Only the unrestricted liberty of the Holy Spirit can produce a right representation and a right functioning and activity of the Body because the Body is the sphere of the Holy Spirit's activity.

We have seen that Christ is the Head of the Body, and that the Holy Spirit has His sphere of activity in the Body. Now taking the familiar illustration from the physical body, we know that every member and every faculty of this physical body is related vitally to the head, and functions in relation to the head, if the body, of course, is in right order. Throughout the whole of this complex physical system there is the network of nerves; a tremendously comprehensive system, linking every needle-point of our physical frame to the farthest extremities with the head, so that you register pain from your finger or toe in your head. Cut your head off and you can injure as many fingers and toes as you like and you will not feel it! Everything has its location in the head, all the sensibilities of the members are registered in the head. It is possible to take a needle and, if the whole brain system is understood, to apply the needle-point to any given part of the brain and put out of action any member of the body, and leave the others untouched. By an understanding of that system a needle can be applied to a certain point in the brain and put the hand, or the foot, out of operation and leave the other members operating, this whole thing is so wonderfully gathered up in the head. Christ is the Head of the Body, all the members are joined to the Head, all the members are consciously registered in the Head, have their consciousness by reason of their relationship to the Head, their consciousness spiritually, which Paul means when he says, "We have the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16b).

But what is that nerve system? It is the Holy Spirit. He is the spiritual nerve system of the whole Body, linking all with the Head, He is the consciousness of the Body, He is the One Who brings from the Head those reactions of the judgments and decisions of the Head. He is the One Who brings to the Head everything concerning every member, and so makes the Body and the Head one complete whole. The Holy Spirit is that nerve system throughout the whole Body. Now if the Holy Spirit is arrested, checked, injured in any one member the completeness of the Body's functioning is at once hindered, interfered with. That is why I said at the beginning that any local company is the whole in effect, that if we, beloved, here, for instance, check the Holy Spirit, or He is arrested, or if here this member is injured in relation to the Holy Spirit the whole Body is affected by that. If the Holy Spirit is checked here, for instance, in the matter of prayer, the whole Body suffers in that, not the local company merely; the whole Body. If the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, has His full way here the whole Body will reap the benefit. This Body is a universal thing and its universality is centred in any local company, the whole is there. How in these bodies of ours, when they are in proper order, one member affects the rest! Have the toothache and every bit of your body suffers with it, it is not long before that abscess in the tooth has you universally involved! It is true. You suddenly burn a bit of your body, a small bit, and your whole body goes through with a shudder.

How true this presentation of the Body is in the Word of God. "If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (I Cor. 12:26). But that is not on the earth. I may be going through a very great deal of suffering without you knowing anything about it so far as the natural life is concerned, you are not affected by it, but beloved, there is a realm where if one member spiritually suffers the whole Body is involved in that suffering, which shows this Body is a heavenly thing and its relationships are not natural, they are spiritual, and that the unifying factor of the Holy Spirit operates apart from the natural consciousness. Have you got that? If we neglect our private prayer the Lord is losing something in His Body far away - His children on the other side of the world are affected by our behaviour. To the natural consciousness it is not so, but the Holy Spirit knows it.

But why always take the negative side, why not the positive, that the maintenance of a true Holy Spirit life is always, whether we are conscious of it or not, to the good of the whole Body of Christ. We do not live to ourselves, or die to ourselves (Rom. 14:7), but the maintenance of a true testimony even where other believers know nothing of the conflict, it may be in a home or business place, where we are physically out of touch with all other believers, members of Christ, yet the maintenance of the testimony there in faithfulness is in that realm of the Body, the heavenlies, a great service to the whole Body. That is why the enemy likes, if he can, to smash a testimony in a home or in a business, because it is not merely the local situation which is affected, but because of the universal blow that he can strike at the very Head, Christ, and we should see to it that the testimony is not something we try to keep up in public gatherings, it is involved in our domestic life, our business life.

Heavenly Relationships Reflected In The "Body"

This brings us back to the Ephesian letter again. All the relationships of the believers are to be on the principle of the one Body. It is not a sweep down from the heavenlies to the earthlies to bring in "Husbands love your wives," etc. That is not coming down to the earthlies, that is saying that relationships of believers are to be on the principle of the one Body. Am I a husband, then my attitude, relationship, conduct to my wife must not be on a human basis but as a fellow member of the Body of Christ, realizing that not merely natural interests are involved but universal interests. In our relationships the whole Body is bound up. You know quite well that is true. If husbands and wives become spiritually dislocated as children of the Lord, there is something in that which does great harm to the testimony of the Lord, and great harm to the Lord Himself and is used by the enemy to become a great adverse spiritual factor over and beyond that local domestic situation, it registers something in the spiritual realm which is harmful. And so in all other relationships; servants to masters, a maid to her mistress. Not just good Christians as on the earth doing their service in a good Christian way - earning wages; not just as an earthly thing, but to regard that master, that mistress, as a fellow-member of Christ. Not unto them as men and women but to recognize that bound up with our service to them is the whole universality of the Body of Christ.

Paul includes the whole Body in the relationships of master and servant, mistress and maid, in principle. That is, I think, most obvious in its outworking. You get believers who are in these relationships of masters and mistresses and servants, and you get some strain between them; beloved, that reaches far beyond the mere

location of it, it reaches out and affects the Lord's interests in a much wider range than that.

If only we recognized this as a declared law of the Body of Christ! It is not a matter of whether we see it doing the mischief or not, it is whether the Lord says it is so. The Lord says here as clearly as anything can be said, that these relationships are not locked up within the compass of their own operation, but they do reach out into a great universal expanse of the heavenly Body and the whole Body of Christ is spiritually affected by these strains which come into these relationships.

You see what is involved, you see what a motive we have in our relationships for keeping them on a high level. If there comes between those in these relationships, these strains, these cross-purposes, these cross-currents, this being offended and upset, this breach of true love, our attitude must be, not just that this is a miserable unhappy thing, and the sooner we make it up the better; our attitude must be, this thing out in the realm of spiritual intelligences is working against the glory of Christ, this is working against Him as the Head because all these relationships are joined so vitally to the Head; this is working against the Holy Spirit as the unifying power of the whole Body, this is doing damage, and therefore, inasmuch as we are so minutely related to all the members by the Holy Spirit, what one does must somehow, all beyond our realization or consciousness, touch Christ, touch the Holy Spirit, and therefore, all other members. It is doing that. That is the revelation here, that is the nature of the Body. You see why we should see to these relationships and lift them up out of the earthlies. I think that is something to think more about.

Relativity is the law of the Body of Christ. Relativity is holding fast the Head; and let us beware of trying to maintain the Body in its oneness along the horizontal line. You cannot do it. It is a hopeless thing, and we shall always be running round and making apologies. On the horizontal we cannot do it, but if we hold fast the Head, we shall find our gravitation is together. We cannot give Christ His place fully and absolutely and be at cross-purposes with another believer. Christ must have His place so that we do everything unto Him, all for Him, all for His sake. We cannot have an attitude like that and maintain a grievance with another believer. Holding fast the Head and everything being unto Him would demand an adjustment in our relationships and bring it about. *We cannot love the Lord with all our hearts and not love one of His*; that is a contradiction. So that the oneness of the Body first of all demands that we hold fast the Head.

The Liberty Of The Spirit

There must be the liberty of the Spirit in us in order to realize the Body and its ministry. I am coming down to practical questions. There must be absolute freedom from human organization, ecclesiastical government, man's control *AS SUCH* if there is going to be a full functioning of the Holy Spirit. To get into a hide-bound religious system, ecclesiastical control, a human organization of the Church where you have to preach every so often whether you have anything to say or not because you are paid to do it is absolutely against the Holy Spirit. That is not the principle of the Holy Spirit, and we must be absolutely free from all such things if the Spirit is going to function freely and we are going to have ministry in the Holy Spirit.

That is the principle of the Spirit. It was that that the Jews, the Jewish leaders, were so set against in the case of the Apostle Paul. He said, "certain came in to spy out

our liberty" (Gal. 2:4). What was it? That he had thrown off the yoke of the law and the Jewish system and now he was exercising himself in the universal realm of the Body of Christ, Gentiles and Jews, just as much the one as the other, liberty in Christ. He was free from all yokes of tradition, system, and organization religiously on the earth, in order to fulfil his ministry of revelation as the Holy Spirit led him. That is essential to the Body of Christ. By which I mean that to try to organize the Body of Christ, the Church, and to try to set a programme for it and hand it to the Holy Spirit and say, "will you kindly take the chair and carry out our programme" (that may seem irreverent, I know, but it is not meant to be so) is so utterly contrary to the principle here revealed.

The Body of Christ is a thing emancipated from the earthly systems; it must be to function. It is not our forsaking the earthly system because we have taken hold of certain truths, but our being emancipated. There is a right place for spiritual government and subjection in the Church, and the "free lance" principle is just as wrong as officialism.

But I must come to a close. We will close on that point. We cannot take up Church membership, and we cannot take up Church work in the Body of Christ. We have heard people say they are going to take up Church work. Those ideas are utterly foreign to the truth of the Body of Christ. We cannot join the Body of Christ. Take the physical illustration again, and see how ludicrous it is for someone else's hand or arm to say that it is coming to join my body! It is absurd. This is a Church which we cannot enter into horizontally, we have got to come into it from heaven, we have to come into it by birth, not by adhering or accretion. That is the law of the Body's growth. It is by birth, out from the heavenlies, and what is true of the relationship, the membership of the Body of Christ, is true of the ministry, the work. We cannot take up work or ministry in the Body of Christ. When we get a true spiritual thing representing adequately the Lord's mind, people from the outside cannot come into that and begin to minister. They have to come into the revelation that is there by the Holy Spirit and come into that on an experimental basis. You cannot invite preachers to come and preach. The fellowship in that ministry is the fellowship of revelation: that you have come into it on the same ground, by the same way, you have been born into it from above, the only basis of Body ministry.

The organized church can do anything it likes, but in the Body of Christ, no! In its ministry the thing is essentially coming in from above and not joining from the outside. So we cannot join the Church in the New Testament sense, we cannot take up Church work in the New Testament sense, we have to be an organic part of it, and the revelation of the truth of the Body has no place for that system which appoints officers and workers in a kind of mechanical, official way. You cannot take hold of a brother and make him an official in the Body of Christ, you can in an earthly system, but not here. Such must grow up by a spiritual process, and the ministry is expressed, grows up, out of the inner life, it is not official, it is organic.

That opens up a whole realm of truth that would be profitable, but we will stop there just now, and ask the Lord to give us the revelation, if we have not got it, for however much more we may say about it, after all it will become to us only as teaching, truth, doctrine, unless the Lord makes it live, gives us the revelation. But oh, there is such a vast difference between what is called the Church here, its system, its methods, its relationships, and this truth that the Body of Christ is a spiritual, heavenly thing: such a great difference! This heavenly thing is universal in

its range and in its ministry even though it may be but represented by a handful in a location; a universal ministry, something that does not belong to time or space; it is essentially spiritual and that is heavenly, illimitable.