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The Herald of His Grace

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Volume 39
Issue 972

The "Body" in 1 Corinthians 12

Part 2 of 2¹

by — Otis Q. Sellers (1901-1992)

Key Points:

- There was no equality among members of the Corinthian "Ecclesia of God." 8199
- In "the Ecclesia which is His Body" (of Ephesians) every member has the same rights, privileges, and prerogatives..... 8199
- In the present dispensation there is just "one body." God does not recognize the many "bodies" that men have formed..... 8200

Now let us examine I Corinthians 12, and all that we have said will be verified.

Now concerning spiritual gifts [pneumatikon] brethren, I would not have you to be ignorant (:1).



As the chapter opens, the subject is stated plainly. Paul does not say that he did not want them to be ignorant concerning "the ecclesia which is His body," but, "concerning spiritual gifts."

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit, and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all (:4-6).

By these words they are informed that no matter what their gift, operation or administration may be, whether great or small, they were to be neither puffed up, nor to be disappointed.

But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal (:7).

Here they are informed as to the purpose of their

gifts. They were not given for the purpose of self-gratification, neither were they given to satisfy the possessor's pride in the exercise of them. They were "to profit withal." This means that they were for the profit of others, that is, the whole assembly.

For to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit; to another faith by the same spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kind of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will (:8-11).

Here we have a list of the gifts that existed in Corinth. Let us examine each one.

"The word of wisdom"

To some had been given the gift of uttering wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge with the capacity to use it right. Some in the Corinthian assembly could utter wisdom when and as needed.

1. [Editor:] Continued from Bible Student's Notebook 971.

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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Scripture education in a weekly format!

This free electronic publication is dedicated to:

- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);

- union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Romans 6; Ephesians 2:6);
- adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

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This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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“The word of knowledge”

The Greek word which is here translated “*knowledge*” normally carries the meaning of knowledge acquired by effort, learning or experience. None of these Corinthians were more than five years old in Christ, yet to some had been given the gift of mature knowledge, and they possessed all that can now come as the result of long study, effort and experience. Their knowledge was given, ours is acquired. Inasmuch as the Greeks were known for their admiration of wisdom and eloquence, it is plain that these two gifts would be the cause of much pride on the part of some who possessed them, and much disappointment on the part of some who lacked them.

“To another faith”

This does not refer to “saving faith,” for in the next chapter, Paul makes reference to this gift by saying,

though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains (13:2).

This gift of faith made it possible for them to do some very wonderful things. In Acts 6:8 we read,

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

“The gifts of healing”

Note that the plural is used here. These gifts gave to some in Corinth the power to work immediate and complete cures in all cases of sickness and disease.

“The working of miracles”

The results of the exercise of this gift must have been spectacular indeed.

“Prophecy”

Prophecy did not refer wholly to the foretelling of future events, but those who possessed this gift could do that very thing. An example of this is seen in the case of Agabus (Acts 11:28), where he told of a coming famine.

“Discerning of spirits”

This gift gave the one who possessed it the ability to authoritatively state whether a spirit was of God or not. This was a valuable gift, but it probably was not greatly appreciated either by the assembly or by the one who possessed it. It was entirely lacking in that outward show which so delighted the Corinthians.

“Divers kinds of tongues”

This was the ability to speak in any language wholly apart from any previous knowledge or study. In the time that Corinthians was written a man could travel just a few miles and find a different language. This diversity of language greatly hindered all commerce, travel and government. It would have greatly hindered the progress of the gospel, but God gave some the power to speak in any language that the hearers could understand.



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"The interpretation of tongues"

This was the companion gift of speaking in tongues. Those who possessed this could interpret any language a speaker might use.

There seemed to be in Corinth a childish delight in these last two gifts; probably because the possessors could use them to make a great show of wisdom. It is not hard to imagine the confusion that was caused in Corinth by the presence of these diversified gifts in the hands of a carnal people.

Having listed the gifts, it was then the apostle's task to show the place, the purpose and the proper use of these gifts. This he does in a plain and simple, yet exceedingly powerful way by presenting the smooth workings of the human body with its many diversified members as an illustration.

For just as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is the Christ (:12).

The body in this verse is the human body and the statements made concerning it are for the purpose of setting it forth as an *illustration*. The human body is a unit; even though it has many members, all of these members form one body. Even as the human body, so also is the anointed (the Christ). The Greek word for *anointed* and the word for *Christ* are the same. The reference here is to the anointed ecclesia of that period (see I John 2:27).²

2. "But the **anointing** which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same **anoint-**

In order to make his illustration valid, Paul must now demonstrate that their local assembly also is a body, and this he does in the next verse.

For in one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one spirit (:13, RV).

This verse is commonly removed from its setting and made to teach many things which were never intended. Baptism in the spirit began on the day of Pentecost, and this experience was shared in common by all of the out-called of the Acts period. It was true of Jews, and it was true of Greeks; it was true of free-men, and true of slaves. This common experience made a vital link which formed them into one body.

THE USAGE OF "BODY" IN SCRIPTURE

Certain men, hard pressed to support their theories, have deliberately created the impression that whenever you find the word "body" it is a reference to the present out-calling, "the Ecclesia which is His Body." This is not true, but since this erroneous impression is common, it will be necessary for us to be established in the usage of the word "body" in the Scriptures. The clearest reference to the usage of the word "body" is found in I Corinthians 6:16.

*What? know ye not he which is joined to a harlot is **one body**?*

The usage here is exceptionally clear. From this pas-

ing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

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sage we learn that two or more things brought into vital union are considered “*one body*.”

The nation of Israel in the Old Testament was a body. In fact, Israel is called a body in Luke 17:37.

Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.

The reference here is to Israel in the great tribulation. The nations of that day will come together in an attempt to exterminate the body of Israel, just as the vultures gather about a dead body. This fact stands out: the word “*body*” is used here of those who certainly are not included in “*the Ecclesia which is His Body*.”

If we call Israel a body, the priesthood a body, each tribe a body, the twelve disciples a body, a man and his wife a body, a man and a harlot a body, the church of God a body, the present out-calling a body, we will not be violating in the least the scriptural use of the word “*body*.” All of these are two or more things which have been brought into vital union or relationship. It is not right to play tricks with the word “*body*,” as if it were never used of anything except the present out-calling.

Paul, having set forth the human body as an illustration, then sets forth the out-called of Corinth as a body because they had all been baptized into one spirit. They were *not* baptized into one body, but into one spirit, and this vital link formed them into one body. *There is not a line in Scripture to prove that the spirit ever baptizes*, neither is there a line to prove that believers are baptized into the body by the spirit.

Christ was the baptizer, and He was to baptize in the spirit. This being true of the out-called at Corinth, in the Pentecostal Dispensation, it made them one body. But even without this they still would have been one body,

for we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread (I Corinthians 10:17).

Thus, we have recorded two separate things that made them “*one body*.” They all partook of “*one bread*,” and they had all been baptized in “*one spirit*.”

Having demonstrated that the Corinthians are a body, the apostle resumes the illustration by again setting forth the human body. ***From :14-26 every statement Paul makes is concerning the human body***, but they are made in such a way that the hearers would immediately see that they are also true of the body of which they are members. His statements could be paraphrased as follows.

The human body does not consist of one member, but many. If the foot were to say, “Because I am not a hand I am not a part of the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. Or if the ear were to say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the smelling be? The truth is that God has arranged every member of the human body as it has pleased Him. If they were all one member, where would the body be? As a matter of fact there are many



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parts but only one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you;" nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you." Those parts of the body which seem somewhat feeble are indispensable. Without them the body cannot function properly.

relegated them to the position of the feet. Yet, one needed and was dependent upon the other.

We will do well to note that, in this chapter, the "head" is composed of those who were thus appointed, such as eyes, ears and nose.³

It is not difficult to apply each of these statements to the local "ecclesia of God" of the Acts period. The very gifts of some gave them an importance that we usually attach to the eyes, and the gifts of another

3. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?" (1 Corinthians 12:17).

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In the present out-calling, Christ alone is the Head.

The human body can be used very effectively as an illustration of the kingdom “*Ecclesia of God*.” However, the human body cannot genuinely illustrate “*the Ecclesia which is His Body*,” for the outstanding truth of Ephesians is that this ecclesia is a joint-body. In a joint-body absolute equality prevails. Each member is the peer of every other member. No member can claim to be the “eyes” or the “ears” of God’s present out-calling.

There is no equality of members in the human body. The eyes are more valuable than the fingers. **There was no equality among members of the Corinthian “*Ecclesia of God*.” Some were apostles, some were prophets, some were teachers, and some were healers.**

In “*the Ecclesia which is His Body*” every member has the same rights, privileges, and prerogatives. This was not true in “*the Ecclesia of God*.” If a man was an apostle, it was because God had set him in the ecclesia as an apostle, and only these could be apostles.

Those who use the human body as an illustration of “*the Ecclesia which is His Body*” are ignorant of the character of God’s present out-calling. They speak as if some today were the “eyes” and “ears” of the body, but they will never go so far as to name just one that God has appointed to do the seeing and hearing for the one body revealed in Ephesians.

Now we are **a body** of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27).

These words were spoken to the Corinthian ecclesia. A review of the context will show that the message was narrowed down to this one assembly. **The definite article (“the”) that appears in most English translations before the word “body” is not found in any Greek text.** There is no indefinite article (“a”) in the Greek language, so where the definite article is omitted, it has to be considered indefinite, unless the definite character of the noun is clearly indicated by the context.

The insertion of the definite article here would make the passage untrue. **The Corinthians were not THE**

body of Christ. They were a body, or one body of Christ, but not the body. This would have excluded other assemblies such as Rome and Thessalonica. The Corinthians themselves were *one* body, and they belonged to Christ. The Romans were their own one-body assembly that belonged to Christ. Thessalonica was another.⁴

In :28-31 Paul gives a list of eight things ranging from “apostles” to “diversities of tongues” which he says God has “set in the ecclesia.” This statement prompts us to ask immediately, “Which ecclesia? – *The Ecclesia which is His Body*?” If so, then the things listed here should be found today among the members of God’s present out-calling. Yet, they are *not* to be found, and these final words of Paul settle the question of the witness of I Corinthians 12. It is not a treatise concerning God’s present out-calling. Instead, it was a treatise on the place and proper use of the many gifts given to the kingdom “*ecclesia of God*.”

The “Body” in Romans 12

In Romans 12 we have the same teaching as in I Corinthians 12, only in Romans the message is greatly condensed. There the illustration is also the human body, and likewise it is used to set forth the proper function of gifts in the ecclesia. Paul’s statement, “*having then gifts differing*,” is enough to show that it is not a reference to the joint-body revealed in Ephesians.

The “One Body” of Ephesians

There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are 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 (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Paul’s statement concerning the “one body” here in :4 does not say that there has always been, and

4. [Editor:] Here are translations that accurately render the phrase of I Corinthians 12:27:

- “you but are a body of Anointed” (ED);
- “you are a body of Christ” (FAA);
- “a body which is Anointed” (JMNT);
- “ye yet are body-of-anointed” (CS);
- “you are a body for Christ” (FF);
- “you, yet, are a body of Anointed” (DT).

always will be, just “one body.” Yet, in the present dispensation there is just “one body.” God does not recognize the many “bodies” that men have formed, and Paul exhorts us to keep the unity of this “one body” (:3).

Theologians of past generations believed and taught that the “church” began with Adam and included all of the redeemed up to the New Heavens and Earth. This error superimposed upon the Word of God has kept most in ignorance for centuries.

It was a glorious day when some made their first attempts at *right division* and began to make a clear distinction between Israel’s Kingdom and God’s present secret out-calling. But, after a good beginning it seems that there was an attempt on the part of most expositors to see how many places they could find the ecclesia, or a revelation of the ecclesia, in the Word of God. They supposedly “saw” it in Eve in Genesis 2, in Rebecca in Genesis 24, in the wife of Joseph in Genesis 41, in the tabernacle of Exodus 24, in the Song of Solomon, in the kingdom parables of Matthew 13, in prophecy in Matthew 16, in the instructions given in Matthew 18, and in the five wise virgins of Matthew 25.

In the events of Pentecost they supposedly “find” its birth; in the book of James, addressed to the Twelve

Tribes scattered abroad, they claim to “find” its walk.

They force its history into Revelation 2 and 3; they purport to “see” it in the twenty-four elders of Revelation 5; they make it the bride of Revelation 19, and put it in the Jerusalem of Revelation 21.

Therefore, we must not be surprised when they assume that they “discover” a great revelation concerning it in a passage which from beginning to end is a treatise on gifts (I Corinthians 12).

We are the out-called members of “*the Ecclesia which is His Body.*” Our calling has its own unique purpose sphere, truth, walk, blessings, hope and destiny. Let us determine to discover what these are by a faithful, prayerful, careful study of the Ephesian and Colossian epistles. **BSN**

(abridged & edited)

— *The Word of Truth*

January-February, 1940

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