

# Believers as the Body of Christ

## Introduction

In the last session we saw that Jesus taught that the church was something which was still to come in the future. Also we saw that the church could not begin until several things happened:

- the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ
- the coming of the Holy Spirit with a special ministry to believers

We looked at the book of Acts where in chapter one (before His ascension) Jesus promised that within a few days the disciples would be “baptized” with the Holy Spirit, and then in chapter two we read how this event occurred which inaugurated the church. Now in this session we want to look at the special baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit and how it functions to bring believers into the “body of Christ.”

## The Illustration of the Body of Christ

The apostle Paul painted a wonderful word picture to express the relationship between Christ and those who put their faith in Jesus. He developed an analogy between the physical human body and the relationship between Christ and those who believe (1Co 12:12-27)

### **Analogy between the physical body and believers in the church age**

(1 Cor 12:12-13,27)

<sup>12</sup> For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. <sup>13</sup> For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink (John 7:39) of one Spirit. ... <sup>27</sup> Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.”

This passage helps us answer the question: “How do believers become part of the body of Christ?” 1 Cor 12:13 tells us that a special ministry of the Holy Spirit is what adds believers to the body of Christ. It was not something that the Holy Spirit did during the Old Testament period, but it was part of that new ministry given to the Holy Spirit for the benefit of believers during the church age. This new baptizing ministry of the Holy Spirit was predicted in the gospel accounts (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and was promised by Jesus (Acts 1:5). It had its beginning on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2; Acts 11:15-16), and it was explained by the apostle Paul (1 Cor 12:13). This baptism by the Holy Spirit is a one-time experience that happens at the moment a person trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is not something that the believer may even be aware of, but it is the action of the Holy Spirit that joins the new believer with the body of Christ. Later in his Christian life a believer may choose to participate in the ordinance of water baptism to demonstrate his new faith to others in the community, but this is a completely separate action which is done by the hands of men rather than the Holy Spirit.

The “Body of Christ” is referred to as “The Church” (Colossians 1:18, 24). But we need to understand that the “Body of Christ” used this way refers to all believers in all locations at all times since the Day of Pentecost when the Church began. This is the universal sense in which the Church is made up of all believers everywhere during the church age. And that is the sense in which the Holy Spirit's baptism operates. Believers are part of something much bigger than a small local gathering of believers.

## The placement and gifting of the members of the body (1 Cor 12:7,11,18)

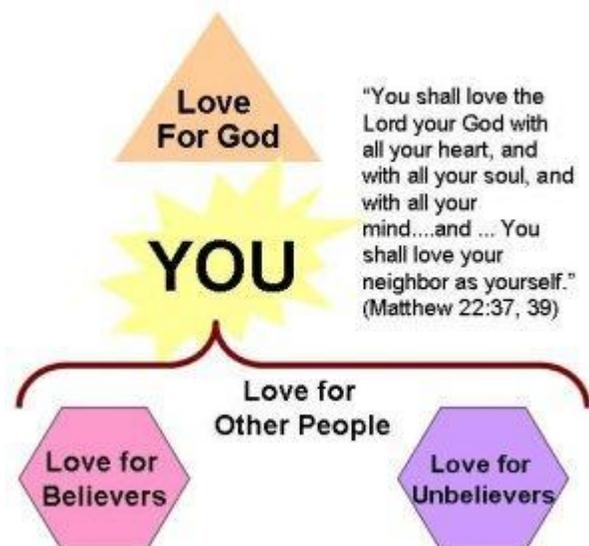
<sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... <sup>11</sup> But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ... <sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired."

The body of Christ is a large body, spanning the globe as well as spanning a large time period since the Day of Pentecost. Notice that God is the one who is in control of which believers receive specific spiritual gifts for the functioning of the body as a whole. At various times and at various places, God brings different believers together in order that the body might be nurtured and sustained. From this we can see that "membership" in the church is something that every Christian receives at the moment he believes. After that one-time experience, God then directs believers to use their Spirit-given gifts in different places and at different times, possibly within different local gatherings of believers.

Just as we need to keep in mind the distinction between the baptism of the Spirit and the ordinance of water baptism, we also need to keep in mind that there is a distinction between membership in the Universal Church (the body of Christ) and affiliation with a local gathering of believers in a local church. Every believer is a member of the Universal Church (the body of Christ), but affiliation with local gatherings of believers may vary throughout the earthly lifetime of a believer. God will bring gifted believers together at times and places of His choosing.

### What are the responsibilities of the members of the body of Christ?

As we think about the responsibilities of the members of the body of Christ it is helpful to look at the main relationships in every believer's life. These relationships were summed up by Jesus when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind....and ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37, 39) We have a duty to love God as well as to love other people around us, including believers as well as unbelievers. We could picture it this way.



First we'll examine our relationship to God. The New Testament tells the believer to develop his relationship with God through the following activities:

- **Worship** (Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3)
- **Pray** (Acts 2:42; Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17; 1 Pet 4:7)
- **Seek God through His Word** (Acts 6:4; Eph 6:17; Colossians 3:16; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 4:12, 13:7; James 1:22-23; 1 Pet 2:1-3)
- **Give thankfully** (Romans 12:8; 2 Cor 9:7; Phil 4:15-17)
- **Celebrate the Lord's Supper** (1 Cor 11:23-27)
- **Be baptized** (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:41, 16:15; 18:8)



Next we'll examine our relationship to other believers. We see in the New Testament that the believer is to develop his relationship with other believers through the following activities:

- **Fellowship & Caring** (Romans 12:10, 13:18; Eph 4:2, 32)
- **Serving** (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:12; 1 Peter 4:10)
- **Giving** (Rom 12:8; Phil 4:15)
- **Prayer** ( 2 Cor 1:11; Eph 6:17-18)
- **Encouraging & Exhorting** (Eph 4:25; 1 Th 5:11; 1 Tim 4:13; Heb 3:13)



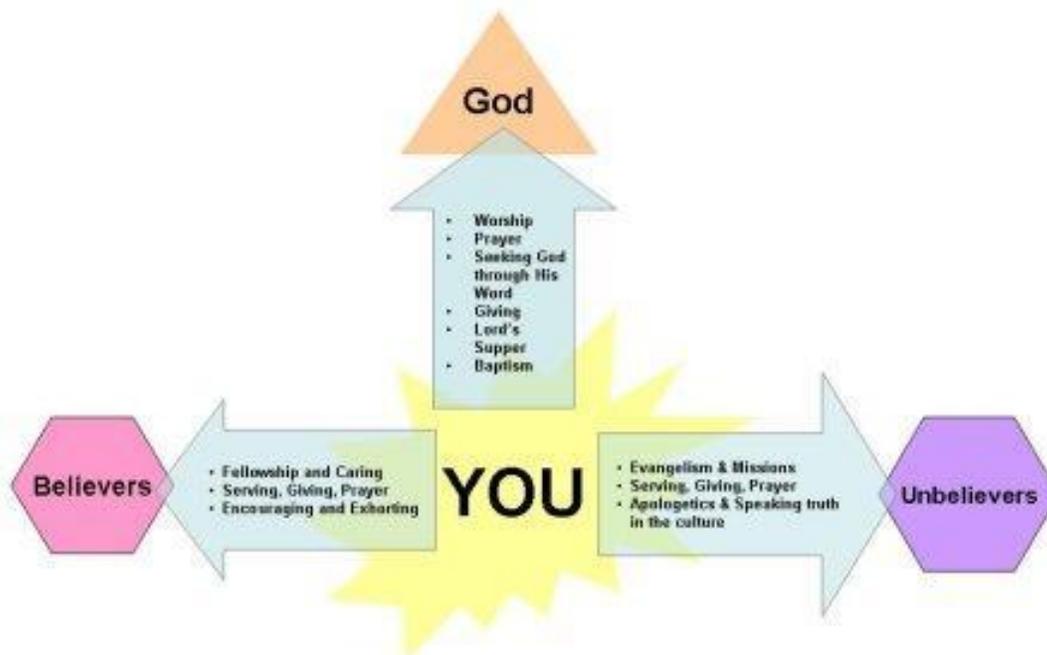
Finally we'll examine our relationship to others who are not believers. We see in the New Testament that the believer is to develop his relationship with non-believers through the following activities:

- **Evangelism & Missions** (Matt 28:18-20; Eph 4:11)
- **Serving** (1 Cor 3:5)
- **Giving** (Rom 12:20; James 2:16)
- **Prayer** (Eph 6:19-20; 1 Tim 2:1)
- **Apologetics & Speaking truth into the culture** (Acts 17:17)



If we look at the entire picture, we can get an overview of the responsibilities of a believer. One of the things we will see here is that responsibilities like that contained in the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 were given to individual believers rather than to the local church as an organization or institution.

One theologian put it this way: “Strictly speaking the divine commission of the church is given to individual believers rather than to the corporate body. Christ as the Head of the church is able to direct each believer in the paths of the Lord's will in keeping with His personal gifts and the plan of God for the individual life.” (Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*)



This is a good point because we often confuse the responsibilities given to individual believers with the functions we assume are the job of the local church with its paid staff. As believers we often abdicate our responsibilities to those we look upon as paid professionals.

If all of these responsibilities are given to us as individual believers, then we might begin to wonder, "What IS the purpose and function of the local church?" In the next session we will look at how the local church is supposed to function to help the believer to carry out these responsibilities.