

Church = a Body

30.04.2006

“The body of Marilyn Monroe”.

If you had to describe Marilyn’s body, you might describe how she used to look. Or you might say it does not look too good now. Or you might even stretch the meaning just a touch to include the body of her work, which were the films she made. But I really doubt that you would say her fans were Marilyn’s body.

“The body of John Howard”.

How would you describe that? He is still alive, so we can point to him if we ever saw him, and say that is his body. What does it include? It includes his head, arms, chest and back, abdomen and legs and all their contents. But I doubt if you would include the parliament’s front bench as being his body.

But the Bible describes the body of Christ in three different ways.

[i] Meaning the actual physical body Jesus had from birth, in which he grew up, worked and then died on the cross. His body was then raised from the dead and he could appear in rooms and disappear again, eat fish, and go up into the air on the clouds.

[ii] The body of Christ also means the metaphor Jesus used in the last supper, where he said “This is my body” while holding the bread.

[iii]. The body of Christ also means the church. Repeatedly in the New Testament, Christians are said to be part of Christ’s body. This body can be referring to all Christians, as in Colossians 1:24 *“I’m now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”*

OR Christ’s body can refer to the local church at any one time, as in 1 Corinthians 12:27, where after referring several times to the all inclusive use of body, with eg *“we are the body of Christ”* he says referring to the Corinthian Christians, *“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”*

But today I want to focus on the church being Christ’s body.

Sometimes instead of being the body of Christ, Christians may feel that they are in the body of Christians. The body of Christians has a different emphasis than the body of Christ. The body of Christians implies a swarming mass of people, like ants or bees. It is like imagining that we are like the soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war. Remember that long battle some years ago? Millions of soldiers lined up against each other. Wave after wave were killed as they headed over the trenches. They became just another body in the pit. More came from behind to fill in.

If we think of the body of Christ like that, then we will miss out on the importance, the joy and the satisfaction that comes from being part of the body of Christ.

Most of the time when Paul refers to the church as Christ’s body, it is in the context of stressing the unity we have, even though there are differences between Christians. We looked at this briefly last week, when we considered the church is family.

1 Corinthians 12:12 says *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are 1 body, so it is with Christ.”*

We belong to and are part of the body of Christ. This is important, because it affects how we think of each other. Listen to Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians 12:14-21 *“Indeed, the body does not consist of 1 member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. and if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to 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 hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each 1 of them, as he chose. If all were a single*

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member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

In our differences, God has made us all part of one body. Each one of us is important. What I do affects you. What you do affects all of us. Each member has the power to promote or imperil the unity we have. We cannot cut ourselves off simply because we're jealous of what another Christian might be doing or receiving.

And we must not reject other Christians and say that they are not part of us simply because they do things differently. If they trust in Christ, they are part of the same body that we are in.

Does that mean we should accept anyone who says they are a Christian, without any standards? The same letter that encourages unity in the body, also warns in chapter 5 against boasting about sexual immorality, and tells them to hand the offender over to Satan. It also chastises them in chapter 11 for getting drunk while letting other Christians starve at parish dinners. Acceptance of other Christians, does not imply no or low standards. We need the standards revealed by Christ through his apostles.

And finally I need to address one further aspect of Christ's body.

How does the body grow? For many years the model in the Anglican church has been to have a paid Rector, and then have special evangelists and missionaries while parishioners do flowers, cleaning, serving etc. The model says ministry is for the professionals, while others are ministered to. But that's not the model that in Ephesians. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 4:11-15 *"The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We*

must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."

Did you see the shift? What does Paul say is the role of the pastor, teacher and the other specially gifted ones? It is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

My role, according to this passage is to help equip you to do the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ. If you are expecting me to minister to everyone, and in every way, then you will be disappointed. Each one of us here is a minister. Do you see yourself like that?

It takes a major shift in thinking, for it is so easy to be lulled into thinking Rob ministers, we are ministered to. However Ephesians 4:11-12 says you are the ministers, I am the person who should equip you.

If you see an area that you can minister in, do it. If it needs finances or permission or support or authorisation, chat to me. If you want to be equipped more, ask.

Let us grow the body of Christ.