

# *Life as a Growing Body*

*(1 Cor. 12:1 - 14:1)*

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## ***I. Introduction***

We know, in our ordinary experience, of no life apart from a body. In fact body really means matter organized with a life-principle at its centre.

Life begins with the body and grows with the body. It may go on without the body; but we do not see life beginning without a body, or growing without a body.

The body is not evil. Matter is not evil. Jesus Christ our Lord took a body, a body of flesh, a material body. His incarnate life began with a body, and grew with the body. The body is not necessarily sinful. There can be sinless bodies; the body of the Christ who took on flesh is an instance of a sinless body.

Let us not hate the body, our own bodies or the bodies of others. The Spirit of God dwells in bodies and works through bodies. God the Son has a body, and the Holy Spirit is in process of building up that body, which Christ called "my father's house", John 2:16-19, "my father's house" is the Jerusalem temple and the risen body of Christ, but in John 14:2 it means the future Church, in which people can "abide" and "bear fruit" (Jn. 15:5).

The Christian Gospel is about the Body - the Body that the Son of God took; the Body in which eternal life operates and is shared by its members; the Body which grows and is built up or edified; the body of a servant who girded his loins and washed the feet of his disciples; the body which Mary anointed with precious oil; the body which was nailed to the cross, the body that rose from the tomb and later ascended into heaven.

The teaching that the soul alone matters is not Christian; it is Gnostic, Hindu, or pagan. Life is a bodily phenomenon. Created life is bodily life - whether of angels or of humans, animals or plants. Jesus Christ took flesh in order that the flesh may be redeemed, not just the soul. It is the flesh that is to rise again, not just the soul.

## ***II. The Texts (1 Cor. 12:1 - 14:1)***

### **Paraphrase:**

Brothers and Sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant of what concerns people with special spiritual or charismatic gifts. You know that previously you were not Jews, but Gentiles who were led without discernment to the worship of dumb idols. So I would want you to know that

anyone who has the true spirit of God will never say 'Jesus be accursed' (as some people do under pressure from the Jew or the persecuting pagan). Nor can you boldly say (when under similar pressure) "The Lord is Jesus" unless you have the Holy Spirit empowering and emboldening you.

Now the charismatic gifts of the Spirit are diverse; but the Spirit who gives these gifts is One and the same. And the Spirit's ministries are diverse; but it is the same Lord who ministers through all the ministers. The operators of the dynamic powers are also diverse; but it is the same God who energizes and operates in all things, all people, as well as in all the operators.

But to each one is given a different expression of the Spirit, as fits each case and is good for the whole. To some the words of wisdom are given through the Spirit; to others it may be the words of scholarship; but it is the same Spirit who gives; the same Spirit gives to others deep faith; to some the healing gifts; to yet others the gift of operating unusual powers; to some the gift of prophecy; to others the gift of distinguishing between good spirits and evil spirits; to some others gifts of the type that enables speaking in unknown tongues, to yet others the gift of interpreting what they speak - yet it is always one and the same Spirit who is the single operator behind all these various operations; choosing by his own will to give a different gift to each.

It is like the operation of the body. The body is one, but it has many different organs; despite the variety of organs the body is still one. The same is true of Christ. You are all baptized into that one Christ by the one Spirit; it makes no difference whether you were formerly Jews or gentiles, freemen or slaves i.e, before you were baptized. It is one and the same Spirit from which we were all given to drink.

And the body is not a single organ, but composed of many different organs. Suppose the foot were to say "since I am not a hand I do not belong to the body"; its saying so will not make it outside the body. And if the ear, for example, says "I am not the eye , so I don't belong to the body." That would not make the ear not to belong to the body. Supposing the whole body were the eye, where would hearing be? And if the whole body were the sense of hearing, where would the sense of smell be?

But now, God has set the various organs and limbs to their own place in the body, as He willed. If the whole thing was a single organ where would the body be? As it is, the organs are many but the body is still one... Each organ has its form and function. What is comely in form may be lowly in function. What is functionally good needs perhaps no comeliness of form. God has put together the whole body, giving special honour to the humbler, parts. The point is that there should be no division in the body through pride of form or function. Each has need of the other for common functioning, and all parts should be concerned for each other. If one organ is in pain, the other organs suffer with it; if one organ gets a special glory, all organs can rejoice together.

Now, you people together are the one Body of Christ, each one a functioning organ within it. And you people, God has set in different functions in the Church - first Apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then those with miraculous powers, then healing powers, pastoral

helpers, rulers, and the kind of people who speak in tongues. But is everyone an apostle? or is everyone a prophet? are all teachers? do all have miracle working powers? do all have the gift of healing? Do all speak in tongues? or do all have the ability to interpret the tongues?

I would say, seek after the nobler gifts. And I will show you the noblest of ways. If I can speak the languages of humans as well as of angels, and yet have no love, I am but a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, know all deep mysteries and possess all knowledge, even if I have the faith that moves mountains, and yet have not love, I am nothing.

### ***Meditation***

1. Imagine your own body. Picture the various systems beautifully co-ordinated: the breathing system; the blood system; the food and drink system; the nerve system; the bone and muscle system; picture also the various organs - the brain, the eye, the ear, the skin, the tongue, the heart, the liver, the pancreas, the lungs etc. See how intricately they are put together to form a body within which life functions.

2. Picture in your mind how this body functions in relation to the outside: the intake of oxygen from the air and the emission of carbon-di-oxide; the intake of food and drink and the elimination of the waste; the intake of images through the eye; sound waves through the ear; of particles of fragrant objects through the nose, of heat and cold and other sensations through the skin. We cannot live as human persons without interacting with the material world and the world of other living beings.

3. Imagine again how all the movements of the planet earth are essential to the life-cycle - the movement around its own axle, the orbiting around the sun, the moon orbiting around the earth, the whole solar system in relation to the galaxy, the galaxies in the universe etc. All the movements are directly related to my life - my existence. To take the simplest example, the sun gives the energy which plants convert into food; the sun causes night and day, rain and snow, sunshine and storm - all of which affect us. No human being is an isolated island.

4. Now imagine all the cells in one's body - billions of them, constantly growing, decaying and replaced, so that almost none of the cells in my body which existed 20 years ago are there today. What is the energy that creates cells, uses them, discards them and replaces them in such an orderly and systematic way that continuity is not lost?

5. Imagine again the energy system that makes the universe go on with all its complex systems, that makes our solar and planetary system work, the life-system work, the life in our bodies work.

6. Now picture to yourself the new life-system that was born in this world in the womb of a Virgin, by the Annunciation of the Word of God through an angel, and through the activity of the Holy Spirit of God. This new germ of life in the womb of the Virgin is an integral part of our

universe and our life-system; it is an ovum in the womb of the Virgin that is fertilised and grows by the process of cell-multiplication common to all human embryos. And yet its origin is not in "the fleshly desire of a human father" as the New English Bible puts it (John 1:13), but from God Himself - the eternal Word, eternally with the Father, the express image of God.

7. It is this new life-system, paradoxically identical with our human system, and at the same time totally *Sui generis*, without parallel, in that it is a new life, the life that is fully human and fully divine, which because it is human can go through death and come alive through the resurrection. Imagine in your mind the irruption of this new life-system into our old death-bound life-system. Imagine the conception in the Virgin's womb as the Great Beginning of the life that overcomes death.

8. Reconstruct the tableau of the angel bringing the Gospel - the Word of God - to this humble poor Palestinian Jewish girl (If you can get an Eastern Orthodox icon of the Annunciation, place it before you and meditate on it).

9. Imagine then that divine human life growing in the womb, its infancy, boyhood and adulthood; its healing and teaching ministry, its struggle against the Prince of Death in the wilderness (the Temptation); the struggle against representatives of the old life; its Crucifixion and Resurrection. Recreate the picture of what happened in the Tomb - the sudden coming back to life of a body several days dead; its coming out of the Tomb, its appearances to Mary Magdalene and to the Apostles, its ascension into heaven.

10. Now imagine the company of Apostles in the Upper Room as they waited on Pentecost in gloom and near-despair, but with faith and a faint hope - like many of us - life afraid of death, light afraid of darkness (Acts 2:1-4).

11. Now imagine again the new irruption of Life at Pentecost. The noise like a strong driving storm, coming from above, and shattering the gloom and the despair; filling the house with its power, energising the weak and dying; the flame-tongues that settled and sat on each disciple; the speaking in tongues; the bold witnessing to the crowds about the new life that has irrupted into our dead world.

12. Imagine now that small group of people welded together into a well knit community by the Holy Spirit; the new boldness of power; the new warmth of burning love; the bold preaching of the new life. It is this that is now the Body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power that binds together those humble fishermen and makes them the power that would ultimately over throw all tyranny and oppression. It is to this body that all gifts are given by the Spirit - apostleship, prophecy, healing, teaching, serving, witnessing. It is this Body where the new life can be experienced and witnessed to.

13. What makes the Body united is the presence of the Spirit of God, the same Spirit who came and abode upon Christ at his baptism. The most fundamental gift of this Spirit, the new gift and

the new commandment, is love (Romans 5:5; John 15:17; I Cor. 14:1). It is this love that unites the Church, and makes it a true servant of God, the visible manifest presence of God in the world, the Christ-presence in the world. Without love there is neither unity nor witness.

14. Meditate on the relation between love and life. Love creates life; God's love created ours, both the old life and the new life. Love sustains life; God's love sustains us in life. Love is the true basis of hope. He who loves can hope *and* trust in the Loved One.

15. Exercise: Be still and know - know God's love; may that love be poured into your heart by the Spirit. As you surrender, God's Spirit takes over. Keep nothing back. Give all to love.

### *Prayers for Quiet Meditation*

O God our Father, my Lord and Master, unto Thee I surrender my body and soul. Rule Thou in my heart, be my sovereign Lord. Keep my mind and will, my body and soul, my feeling and my desire, all under Thy divine command. For, except Thou guide them they go wherever they want, and I become their slave. But when Thou art in command all is under control. I am too weak now to control my feelings and desires, my wants and fears.

Make me strong, Lord Jesus Christ and make me pure. Drive out all evil desire. Infuse the purity of Thy Spirit into my body and soul. Let no evil spirit have sway over my body or soul. Let the Holy Spirit take over, and let His love build me up, His holiness purify me, His wisdom lead me. Unite my body with Thy body, O Christ, and my soul with Your Soul.

Come, Holy Spirit, come as the fire and burn away all the chaff in me. Come to convict, to convert, and to consecrate. Come as the wind and cleanse me of all the dust and dirt in me. Come as the light and show me Thy way. Come to heal, to comfort, to give strength and wisdom. Come Holy Spirit, come, I am Thine.

But above all, at this very moment of prayer, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, fill me with the love of people. May my heart be filled with compassion for others, and may my will be quickened to serve those in need. Teach me to weep with the weeping and to rejoice with the joyful. Unite my heart and soul with the needs of others, with their suffering and joy, with their hopes and fears, so that I no longer live for myself. Teach me to pray, not so much for my own needs, as for the needs of others.

Pour out Thy love into my heart, as well as into the hearts of others, so that all our hearts may be welded together by Thy love. For Thou art love, and where truth and love, compassion and holiness, peace and righteousness meet, there Thou art.

Into Thy loving hands, O Lord, we commend our own selves, as well as the selves of all mankind. Have mercy upon us and unite us all by Thy love.

Thy Kingdom come, Amen.