

# THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH, AND THE LOCAL CHURCHES

## I. All believers are made part of the body of Christ through the work of the Spirit

- a. All believers are ushered into the body of Christ by the Spirit and enjoy the body life by enjoying the Spirit

*<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 of one Spirit. <sup>14</sup> For the body is not one member, but many. 1 Corinthians 12:13–14*

- b. All believers are members of the body, need one another, and are needed by one another

*<sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup> If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> But now there are many members, but one body. <sup>21</sup> And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; or again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 1 Corinthians 12:18–22*

## II. The universal church is the body of Christ and is expressed in the local churches—golden lampstands

- a. The universal church is the body of Christ made up of all believers throughout time and space

*<sup>22</sup> And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22–23*

- b. God wishes to make His wisdom known through the church

*<sup>10</sup> so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:10*

- c. Many local churches, which are golden lampstands, together testify of Christ and the Spirit, and express the one universal church

*<sup>20</sup> “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. Revelation 1:20*

## III. The vision: Together the local churches as golden lampstands testify of the one Lord Jesus Christ and of the universal body of Christ

- a. There is one body and one Spirit and One Lord

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; Ephesians 4:4*

*<sup>28</sup> “What commandment is the foremost of all?” <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;’ Mark 12:28–29*

- b. Jesus prays that all believers would be one so the world may believe

*<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:21*

- c. All the local churches should not have division, but be expressions of the one Christ with His one body

*<sup>10</sup> Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1 Corinthians 1:10*

#### IV. The New Testament Local Church

- a. Having the boundary of a city

- i. The local church in the New Testament was designated by city, such as Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Colossae, Jerusalem, Antioch, Cenchrea, Philadelphia, etc. In the New Testament there was one local church in one city.

*<sup>2</sup> To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: 1 Corinthians 1:2*

- ii. When Jesus told John to send his book to seven churches, he listed seven cities, showing there was one church in one city.

*<sup>11</sup> saying, "Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." Revelation 1:11*

- b. A New Testament local church with its boundary as the city has no special name, receives all the believers in that city, and is a definite expression of the truth

- i. New Testament local churches had no special name or designation, except the name of the city and the description of being of God, in Christ, and of the saints

*<sup>14</sup> For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, 1 Thessalonians 2:14*

- ii. New Testament local churches receive all believers, regardless of opinions, small doctrinal issues, or different practices

*<sup>1</sup> Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Romans 14:1*

*<sup>6</sup> so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. Romans 15:6–7*

*<sup>11</sup> a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11*

- iii. The New Testament local church has a definite gathering, so the whole church can come together (1 Corinthians 14:23)

- 1. The New Testament local church was definite enough that a believer knew where to go if they were to "tell it to the church"

*<sup>17</sup> "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Matthew 18:17*

2. The church must be definite enough that we can have a day-by-day church life
 

<sup>26</sup> *What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.* 1 Corinthians 14:26

<sup>42</sup> *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* Acts 2:42
3. The church must be definite enough to be a pillar and support of God's truth
 

<sup>15</sup> *but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.* 1 Timothy 3:15
4. The church must be definite to have elders and deacons
 

<sup>28</sup> *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.* Acts 20:28
- iv. New Testament local churches enjoyed fellowship with other local churches
 

<sup>16</sup> *When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.* Colossians 4:16

<sup>29</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'* Revelation 2:29

c. Supplement

- i. Contents of a healthy local church. For a church to be healthy it must be full of Christ, the Spirit, life, the experience of the body of Christ, and the experience of the cross.
  1. Christ: the local church should express Christ because its members are filled with the riches of Christ
 

<sup>2</sup> *that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* Colossians 2:2-3

<sup>9</sup> *For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;* Colossians 2:9-10
  2. The Spirit: The local church is a dwelling of God in Spirit and is full of the manifestation of the Spirit
 

<sup>22</sup> *in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.* Ephesians 2:22

<sup>4</sup> *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. <sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. <sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

3. Life: The local church is an assembly of believers brought together based on life; they are a family and a household who share the same life because all the believers are born of God

*<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, Ephesians 2:19*

*<sup>11</sup> And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. <sup>12</sup> He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 1 John 5:11–12*

4. The experience of the Body: The local church is where the believers can function and be supplied as members of the Body of Christ

*<sup>18</sup> But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 1 Corinthians 12:18*

*<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 1 Corinthians 12:22*

5. The cross: The local church is the place we can take up our cross and follow Jesus, giving life to the other members as death works in us

*<sup>23</sup> And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. Luke 9:23*

*<sup>11</sup> For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death works in us, but life in you. 2 Corinthians 4:11–12*

- ii. Christ's and the believers' great work is the building up of the church, the body of Christ

1. Christ promised to build His church

*<sup>18</sup> "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Matthew 16:18*

2. The body builds itself up in love

*<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:16*

3. We build up the members of the local church

*<sup>3</sup> But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. <sup>4</sup> One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. 1 Corinthians 14:3–4*