Members of One Another

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:5 NASB

Metaphors used for the Church by Paul:

The Apostle Paul used several metaphors to describe the church. In his letter to the Corinthians, he used an agricultural analogy when he wrote—“You are God’s field” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9a). This metaphor beautifully correlates with Jesus’ parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15).

In the same context, Paul used an architectural metaphor. He identified the Corinthians as “God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Paul went on to say that he had “laid a foundation…which is Jesus Christ,” and other spiritual leaders built on this foundation (3:10-11).

Paul then used an anatomical metaphor—one of his most graphic illustrations for the church and one that is exclusively his own in the New Testament. Paul identified God’s people as the “body of Christ”. In his letters to the Romans, Corinthians, the Ephesians and the Colossians, he penned the word “soma”—which is translated “body”—more than thirty times to illustrate the functioning church. Approximately half of these times, he used the word to refer to the human, physical body with its many parts and members. In the other half, he applied the term church—the body of Christ.

The “Body” Analogy:

Paul’s most extensive use of the analogy of the human body appears in his letter to the Corinthians, no doubt because of their carnality and immaturity and especially because of the disunity and divisions that existed among them (1 Corinthians 1:10; 3:1-4). Because of their infant mentality, he made a special effort to spell out clearly and carefully the similarity between the “human body” and “Christ’s body”—the church. In two extensive paragraphs, he used the word “soma” fourteen times to illustrate just how the human body functions. Paul didn’t want them to miss his point! And since he had previously experienced their inability to grasp spiritual truth, and since they were still unable to handle “solid food” (1 Corinthians 3:1-2), he decided to make his point so clear that even the most immature Christian could understand what he was illustrating.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-26

There was no way that even the most immature Corinthian Christian could miss Paul’s message. His point of application was that Christians are “members one of another.” Thus he concluded these lengthy, descriptive paragraphs by adding this concise statement and application; “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27)
When Paul wrote to the Romans, he assumed that they understood the body metaphor—probably because these believers were a lot more mature than the Corinthians. Consequently, he simply stated the analogy and then immediately drove home his point of application:

The Metaphor

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function (Romans 12:4, NASB).

The Application

So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Romans 12:5, NASB).

Three Important Truths:

1) No Individual Christian Can Function Effectively in Isolation and Alone.

Just as there are many parts of one body in the makeup of human beings that enable each of us to perform as individual units, so the body of Christ—the church—is made up of many individual members. And each member is important. We are indeed “members of one another.” No member of Christ’s body can battle against our opponent in the spiritual realm, we must function as one dynamic unit. Interdependence and coordination are absolutely essential.

2) Humility: No Member of Christ’s Body Should Feel More Important Than Any Other Member of Christ’s Body.

No Christian has exclusive rights to God’s grace. This, perhaps, is one of Paul’s major teachings in the passages dealing with the body function. His emphasis is on humility! Though implied all the way through the Corinthian passage (some Corinthians were saying, “I don’t need you” and “I’m more important than you”), Paul made it even clearer in a parallel passage in his Roman letter. Romans 12:3

Paul’s Ephesian letter reflects the same emphasis. Setting the stage for discussing the purpose of gifts (as spelled out in Ephesians 4:11-12), Paul wrote, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

Why did Paul emphasize humility, gentleness, and patience in this passage? Because, as he went on to say, “There is one body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4). This is in essence the same thing he said to the Corinthians; “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). In other words, no member of Christ’s body is more important than the other. Though one person may have a more responsible position, in God’s sight even the person who may go
unnoticed is just as important and necessary in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:22-23).

3) **Unity: Every Christian Should Work Hard at Creating Unity in the Body of Christ.**

This is why Paul immediately opened the letter to the Corinthians by saying—“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Corinthians 1:10). And this is why he also wrote to the Ephesians in the very same passage where he discussed body function: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of Peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Emphasizing the same point, he wrote to the Romans—“let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Romans 14:19). Put another way, Paul was exhorting these Christians to do everything they could to “build up one another.”

**Corporate Maturity/Personal Maturity:**

Biblical writers emphasize two important truths. Again and again we’re told to become mature both corporately and personally.

**Corporate Maturity:** Corporate maturity is reflected in the degree of faith, hope, and love—but especially love—that is developed in any given local church. 1 Corinthians 13:13. Read also 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; Ephesians 1:15-18; Colossians 1:3-5).

**Personal Maturity:** Is reflected in the characteristics outlined by Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and Titus chapter 1. Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9. Though these qualities are listed for those who become spiritual leaders, they are in reality a profile for Christian maturity that is detailed throughout the New Testament. Paul is simply saying that if anyone desires to be a spiritual leader, it’s a wonderful goal. However, that person should make sure that he is a mature Christian. Paul then described what should characterize a mature believer.

**Application:**

- If you could be any part of the human body, what part would you choose? Why?
- The part of the body that I think I am most like is? Because?

**Discuss:**

1.) What does it mean to you personally to be a member of the body of Christ? How have you been built up by other Christians?
2.) Why are interdependence, humility, and unity so important for the body of Christ to function? In what specific ways have you seen each of these characteristics in your own church?

3.) What would you consider to be the marks of Christian maturity? How is maturity developed? What is the relationship between “body maturity” and “personal maturity”?

4.) How do the structures in Cornerstone foster “body function”? In what ways do they hinder this biblical process?