



Jonesboro Heights Baptist Church
Sanford, North Carolina

Dr. Mark E. Gaskins
Senior Pastor

The Lord's Day
April 26, 2009

www.jhbc.org

© 2009

Belonging to the Body
Romans 12:1-5

Today, as we've baptized new believers and will share in Holy Communion in a few minutes, we're focusing on these two acts that Christ gave us as *signs*—baptism as a sign of *faith* and communion as a sign of *fellowship*.

Through baptism, we confess our faith in Christ and identify with him and his people, the church. It's a rite that marks the beginning of a believer's faith journey and his or her being made a part of the body of Christ.

When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we remember what God has done for us in Christ, and how he has made us one body in Christ.

Members of the body . . .

Paul uses this image of the church as the body of Christ very frequently in his letters. Our text here in Romans 12 is a good example of that. In verses 4-5 he says:

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.¹

His emphasis here is interesting, isn't it? Just as our bodies are made up of a variety of members with a variety of functions, so is the church. All these many different members make up *one body*. Most of them are very different. Even those that are alike, such as our hands and arms and legs and feet and lungs and kidneys and such, are still different—opposite, in fact, mirroring each other.

And the church is the same way! Though we have much in common, we're all different in some way, and we all have our own distinct functions in the body. As Paul goes on to say, we all have gifts that differ, but we're to use them in concert with the other members of the body for its good as God works out his purpose through us *together* as *one body*.

Of all Paul says here, maybe the strangest thing is his statement that we are “individually members one of another.”

We're not just members of the body as a whole. We are “individually members one of another.”

¹ From the *Revised Standard Version*.

We're not just "members of one another," but "*individually* members *one of* another." Now that's a subtle distinction, but it's an important one!

By stating it the way he does, Paul is emphasizing both the individual and the body. And he's emphasizing the *mutual* nature of our relationships in the body of Christ. This business of being a part of the members runs both ways—not just members of one another, but "individually members one of another." This is a closer relationship Paul is talking about here. It's more interconnected, like the human body.

I mean, think about it. What happens to any individual part of the human body—good or bad—has an impact in some way on the whole body, doesn't it? And by impacting the body as a whole, all the individual members that make up the body are affected, aren't they?

Isn't it amazing how a headache or a toothache or back problems or foot pain make you feel bad all over? Or how pain in one area of your body will raise your blood pressure all over your body? Or how infection in one part of your body will cause your whole immune system to respond?

Do you see what I'm saying?

Every member of the body has its role. Some roles may be more important than others, but *none* are *unimportant*. No matter how young or old, from the newest member to the one who's been a member the longest, *everyone* is important and has a function to fulfill in the body. And whenever one member of the body is hurting or doesn't fulfill its role properly, the whole body is affected. We are "individually members one of another"!

The *New International Version* gets at the meaning of what Paul is talking about here when it translates this phrase this way: "and each member belongs to all the others."

The *Revised English Bible* translates it that we "belong to one another."

The *New Living Translation* expands it a little by rendering it, "we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others."

However you translate the phrase, what Paul is talking about here is *belonging to the body* of Christ. He's saying that *when we belong to the body of Christ, we are vitally interconnected with one another*. We may not sense it, we may not realize it, but we are. *We belong to one another. We need one another. And we are needed by one another.*

Living the connection . . .

So what should it look like to live out this interconnectedness as members of the body of Christ?

Isn't a big part of it *submission*? Submission to Jesus Christ as Lord, as the head of the body? We are *his* body, so he is the one who is to be both the source and the sovereign of our life together.

And in submitting to Jesus as Lord and head, there will be *mutual submission* to one another out of reverence for Christ, as Paul describes it in Ephesians 5:21. We'll be looking out for one another's best interests. Paul put it this way in Philippians 2:3-4 –

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the

interests of others.²

This kind of mutual submission is a part of our submission to Christ.

Belonging to the body as “members one of another” also involves *dependence* on one another, doesn’t it? If we’re so vitally connected to one another, then we must be able to depend on each other, drawing spiritual strength from one another, being able to turn to each other in times of need—whether spiritual, physical, or emotional.

Living out this interconnectedness means we can depend on one another as brothers and sisters in Christ—that we will bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), that we will weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice, and that others will weep with us when we weep and rejoice with us when we rejoice (Romans 12:15). If one member of the body suffers, every member is to suffer with it; if one part is honored, every part should rejoice with it (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Likewise, doesn’t living out this interconnectedness involve *responsibility*? We’re responsible for our own behavior. When we mess up, we’re to *confess our sin*, not try to shift the blame to somebody else!

We’re responsible to use and develop whatever natural abilities and spiritual gifts God entrusts to us to build up the body of Christ and to accomplish the work of his kingdom. So we have the responsibility of fulfilling the role—however great or small it may seem—that God has placed us in the body for. And that’s true for *every* member of the body!

When we’re doing that, we’ll be fulfilling our responsibility to grow in unity toward maturity as we help the body build itself up in love (Ephesians 4:1-16) .

There’s one more piece to this puzzle. It’s the one we most often overlook—*accountability*. Belonging to the body as members one of another means we have to be accountable to one another.

If what I do as your pastor affects you individually and the body as a whole, then I have to be accountable to you and to the body, don’t I?

Isn’t the same true for *all* the members of the body?

Because that concept became petty and extreme in the early part of the twentieth century among Baptist churches in the American South, we pretty much did away with it. We threw the baby of church discipline out with the bath. And we have suffered for it. Most of the conflicts and divisions that take place within congregations today come about over self-centered desires and insistence of individuals or groups on having their own way. And it grieves the heart of the Holy Spirit!

When we live without any accountability so that anything goes in terms of attitude or behavior or morality or teaching or tactics, we are *not* honoring the body of Christ. We’re not living as individually members one of another. In reality, we’re *dishonoring* Christ and his body.

When it happens—or doesn’t . . .

Submission. Dependence. Responsibility. Accountability.

When we belong to the body of Christ, we are vitally interconnected with one another.

² From the *New International Version*.

What we do, how we live as individuals and how we live as a congregation, our attitudes, and our behavior all affect one another and the body as a whole—for good or bad.

I've seen it happen both ways, sometimes in the same church.

In one of my early pastorates, the church had experienced deep division at several different points in its history. God had brought about a time of healing and restoration, to the point that there were worship services when God's presence and our fellowship in Christ were so real and palpable you could almost feel it in the air.

Two ladies who were cousins, both holding important leadership roles, had carried on a running feud over petty personal agendas through the years. During that time of such rich fellowship, there had been a lull in that conflict. Then one Sunday morning, their husbands got into it—at church. The adult son of one of the couples (they lived right beside the church) had driven his log truck through the church yard to park it at the back of their property. The ground beside the church beyond the gravel parking lot was wet, and the trailer wheels had made some ruts in the grass.

And the battle was on.

And the biggest casualty was the church.

That beautiful sense of fellowship was never the same in the rest of our time there. The body eventually recovered, but not without scars. Scars inflicted by these otherwise good, dedicated Christian women and men who in this case refused to submit, took things into their own hands rather depending on the body, and failed in their responsibility to put the body's best interests above their own petty agendas, with no sense of being held accountable to the body or to Christ.

May these things *never* be said about us!

†MEG