

The Metaphor – The Body of Christ

And ye are the body of Christ and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27

Of all the metaphors used for the church there is none more abused and misunderstood than the metaphor of the human body or the body of Christ.

When the New Testament calls the church “*the body of Christ*” are we to understand the church is the literal physical flesh and blood body of Jesus Christ, or the metaphorical (representative) body of Christ? When Jesus says “*I am the door*” are we to understand He is a literal wooden door or is He a metaphorical door to heaven? The failure to distinguish the literal from the metaphorical and properly understand what is a metaphor, and how metaphors are to be properly used has produced confusion and false doctrines.

The terms “*body of Christ*” have but two clear applications in the New Testament; (1) the literal physical body of Christ; and (2) the church as the figurative/metaphorical or *representative* body of Christ.

It is the latter use that is subject to much debate. The argument rages over its membership. Does its membership include all saints in all ages, or all saints between Pentecost and the rapture, or just all saints within the context of a local church body?

A. Understanding the Metaphor

The key to understanding the use and right application of a metaphor is to understand what a metaphor is and how a metaphor can and cannot be used. What will a metaphor permit?

E.W. Bullinger in his book *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* defines a metaphor by comparing it to a simile:

The simile says, “All we like sheep” while the metaphor declares that “we are the sheep of his pasture.” While, therefore the word “resembles” marks the simile: “represents” is the word that marks the metaphor. – p. 735

The simile uses terms such as “*like*” and “*as*” whereas the metaphor uses state of being verbs such as “*am*” or “*is*” and “*are*.” The simile conveys resemblance whereas the metaphor conveys **representation**.

Hence, in I Corinthians 12:27, the term **represent** could be put in the place of the state of being verb “*are*” and you would have the proper sense intended:

*And ye **represent** the body of Christ and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27*

Obviously the church is not the literal body of Christ but only represents it. If this term “represent” is applied in each context it would be much clearer.

However, what kind of representation is intended by a metaphor? Bullinger defines the restrictions placed upon metaphorical representations when he says,

Let it then be clearly understood that a Metaphor is confined to a distinct affirmation that one thing is another thing, owing to some association or

*connection in the uses or effects of anything expressed or understood. The two nouns themselves must both be mentioned, and are always to be taken in their **absolute literal sense**, or else no one can tell what they mean. – Ibid., p. 735 (emphasis mine)*

In other words, this means the characteristics being transferred figuratively from the first to the second noun are those qualities that literally characterize the first noun. For example, “*the body of Christ*” refers to the physical body of Jesus Christ and those qualities that literally characterize that body. What are some literal characteristics found in his physical body that can be transferred metaphorically to the church? The physical body of Christ is **visible** and **local** and it is composed of a diversity of members performing diverse functions but all working in **unity** under the direction/authority of the head. It can convey all these things as well as organization and harmony. However, such characteristics as **universality** or **invisibility** are not qualities that literally characterize his physical body and therefore cannot be metaphorically conveyed or transferred to the church as the metaphorical “*body*” of Christ.

Finally, although there are metaphors such as “*wind*” and “*invisible*” that express invisibility, and there are terms such as “*whole world*” “*heaven and earth*” that express universality, however, such terms are never once used to describe the church or used as a metaphor for the church. Every single term and metaphor used in Scripture for the church is by nature without the ability to convey either universality or invisibility. Every single one! These facts should be regarded as quite strange if the true nature of the church was invisible and universal! However, if the true nature of the church is local and visible then these things are very supportive facts.

B. Two Contextual Historical Facts

There are two historical and contextual facts that cannot be successfully denied.

The first contextual and historical fact is that in all those epistles that deal with the metaphorical “*body of Christ*” the contextual “*we*” has reference to the historical readers of these epistles. Without exception, everyone of the readers are members of churches that are like faith and order with each other. Hence, each body of Christ (I Cor. 12:27) is “*one body*” in number as well as one in kind. It is the “*one*” where the reader’s membership resides. Therefore, the contextual and historical “*we*” does not refer to post-apostolic Christians found within and without diverse denominations which are neither “*one*” in number or “*one*” in kind.

The second indisputable fact is that in Romans 12:4 and in 1 Cor. 12:12 the literal physical human body first introduces the use of the metaphorical body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:13-26). Significantly, in Romans 12:4 the same historical and contextual “*we*” is used in connection with the literal and physical human body:

*For as **we** have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:- Rom. 12:4*

The readers (“*we*”) all share in common one kind of human body wherein there are many members or body parts. How does each reader understand and apply this text? He applies it to the “*one*” body he possesses which is both “*one body*” in number (his own body) and “*one body*” in kind (the same kind that all the readers share in common with each other). He does not

understand or apply such a statement to refer to “*one body*” that is universal consisting of all human beings or even consisting of two or more human beings.

Likewise, when Paul makes the transition from the physical to the metaphorical the same understanding applies:

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. – Rom. 12:5

The historical reader (“*we*”) all share in common one kind of metaphorical church body wherein “*every one*” within that body are “*members of another.*” How does each reader understand and apply this text? He applies it the very same way as he does the preceding verse. He applies it to the “*one*” body where his membership resides which is “*one*” in number as well as “*one*” in kind.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that in I Corinthians chapter five and chapter ten where the metaphorical “body of Christ” is used in the Lord’s Supper the contextual “*we*” is used when Paul is teaching the general truth but when Paul shifts to specific application he drops “*we*” and uses “*ye*” or “*you*” (I Cor. 5:7-10 “*we*” and “*us*” versus I Cor. 5:1-6, 11-13 “*ye*” or “*you*”; I Cor. 10:16-17 “*we*” versus I Cor. 10:19-21 “*ye*”).

The historical and contextual “*we*” of the New Testament epistles always refer to their readers who are members in churches which are like faith and order with each other.

C. One Body

Ephesians 4:4 says there is only “*one body.*” What is that “*one*” body? Many believe Paul is referring to a universal invisible body of Christ made up of all saints in all ages or at least all saints scattered all over the physical earth in all denominations. However, in the immediate context there is a practical application that Paul has in mind. In Ephesians 3:21 Paul tells the Ephesians that glory to God is to be performed in the church by Jesus Christ and Ephesians 4:1-16 explains how God is glorified in the church by Jesus Christ.

First, there is our responsibility to glorify God due to the blessings that God has bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:1).

Second, in order for God to be glorified in the Church by Christ Jesus there must be a spirit or attitude of unity between the members of His body (Eph. 2:3). Third, this unity takes on a visible expression of unity as the words “bond of unity” conveys the idea of a bundle of wheat bound together by a cord (v. 3). This visible expression is then conveyed by the metaphor of “*one body*” (v. 4). Remember, the rules that govern the use of a metaphor restrict it to those characteristics found in the literal concept. Those bound together in a metaphorical “*body*” are members united and working together. This is what a New Testament church is. It is a visible expression of members working together in unity. The “*one body*” is the New Testament church body that the reader of the epistle identifies with. It is not only one in number but one in kind. It is the same kind mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:27 where it is specifically applied to the church at Corinth. In fact, this is the only kind of church body where it is possible that such unity can be visibly expressed in keeping with this context.

Third, for such unity to be obtained and sustained, not only must there be an attitude of unity among its members, but there must be some doctrines that bind it together as well (vv. 4-6). These are essentials for any church body to continue to exist and function as a church.

Fourth, the Lord has provided gifted men to His kind of church in order to teach these truths (vv. 7-11). Apostles and prophets provided the foundation of truth – the oral and written Word of God. The evangelist first gospelized and then organized this body with the preaching and teaching of the Word. The Pastor/teacher became the leader in this body to mature it and equip it and stabilize it so that it is not tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine (vv. 12-14). Such unity comes with teaching and equipping and maturing the members to work together in love and unity so that every member is being matured (vv. 15-16). The “*one body*” in this context is that body where the reader of the epistle resides and is being taught to work harmoniously with the other members who are in practical doctrinal unity with each other.

Significantly, this “one body” is also found in context with “*one baptism*.” Water baptism is the only baptism promised age long continuance (Mt. 28:19-20). The book of Ephesians was written long after the baptism in the Spirit at Pentecost. Water baptism is always in conjunction with the local church body of Christ (Ac. 2:41-42). The entire sevenfold oneness of Ephesians 4:4-6 is involved in building New Testament churches. The “*one baptism*” is the one that is administered by the “*one Spirit*” through human instrumentality (1 Cor. 3:4-9) into “*one body*” upon profession of the “*one faith*” in “*one Lord*” in keeping with “*one hope*” that was provided by “*one God and Father of us all*”. Which “*body*” is this? It is the numerical **one** where the reader of this epistle resides as a member. It is the **one** that is united by these sevenfold truths. It is the **one** where practical working unity among all of its members is possible and actual (1 Cor. 12:25-26). It is the **one** that is same in kind as “*the body of Christ*” at Corinth (1 Cor. 12:27).

D. Compassionate Body

*...but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether **one member** suffer, **all the members** suffer with it; or **one member** be honored, **all the members** rejoice with it. – 1 Cor. 12:25b-26 (emphasis mine)*

The above passage has no practical or possible application to any other kind of “*body of Christ*” other than the local visible kind. How can “*one*” of its members in Corinth rejoice or suffer and all of its members participate if those members were scattered all over the face of the earth?

However, this was not only possible but actually occurred between all the members in the local visible church body at Jerusalem:

*And **all** that believed **were together**, and had **all things common**. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. – Ac. 2:44-45 (emphasis mine)*

*And the multitude of them that believed were of **one heart and of one soul**: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had **all things common**. – Ac. 4:32 (emphasis mine)*

This was true of the church at Rome (Rom. 15:14). At least this is possible for any local visible New Testament church body but it has never occurred among all the members of the so-called universal invisible church body and never will on earth.

E. Organized Working Body

*From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted which **every joint** supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. – Eph. 4:16 (emphasis mine)*

This description can and does fit many local visible church bodies now and in the New Testament times but it never has fit the so-called universal invisible church body. There have never been harmonious efforts between all of its members.

However, Paul praised the church at Thessalonica for their joint efforts for Christ one toward another in the local church body:

*We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of **every one of you all toward each other** aboundeth – (2 Thes. 1:3) (emphasis mine)*

Paul encouraged the divided church at Corinth toward this same kind of unity (1 Cor. 1:10-11).

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Cor. 1:10)

The doctrine of the universal invisible body of Christ has been the source of division and confusion but never unity.

E. Purged Body

*Know ye that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. **Purge out therefore the old leaven**, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. – 1 Cor. 5:6,7 (emphasis mine)*

Preparation for the Lord's Supper is the subject discussed here in lieu of a publicly unqualified member to participate in the Lord's Supper (vv. 1-4). We know it is preparation for the Lord's Supper that is under discussion because the only "feast" kept by Christians where Christ "is" sacrificed "for us" as "our passover" with use of "unleavened bread" is the Lord's Supper. Paul later informs them that when the Lord's Supper is improperly observed it ceased being the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 12:20). Obviously, there was an impropriety being addressed in this chapter in regard to eating with such a brother (v. 11).

Just as Paul later tells them “*ye are* [represent] *the body of Christ*” so he tells them here “*ye are* [represent] *unleavened*” bread. That is, the unleavened bread used in the Lord’s Supper not only represents the literal body of Christ, but it also represents the church as the representative body of Christ. There can be no question that the bread represents the church of Christ in the Supper, as Paul explicitly tells them this in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

Notice that the church at Corinth is represented by “*the whole lump*” and that when one of its members is purged out it becomes a “*new*” lump. Just as the removal of only one member can make it a “*new*” lump, so also the refusal to remove such a member can “*leaven the whole lump*.”

The only possible kind of church body represented by the unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper is the local visible church body. How can only “one” member leaven the “*whole*” universal invisible church body? How can such a church body purge out one of its members so as to be a “*new*” lump? How can such a universal invisible church body receive back such a person (2 Cor. 2:6)?

This can only make sense if the body of Christ is a metaphorical representation of the local church body, such as the one at Corinth.

Some stumble at this because of the use of the plural pronoun “*we*” in such passages as 1 Cor. 10:16-17 and 1 Corinthians 12:13. However, the answer is quite simple. Whenever Paul is using the metaphor abstractly or generically he uses the plural pronoun “*we*” but whenever he makes a concrete application of this metaphor he always says “*ye*” and never “*we*.” Why? **As a general rule, all believers during the apostolic era were baptized members of such local churches.** Therefore when speaking of this metaphor abstractly he could say “*we*” as it applied to all members of this kind of church body. But when applying this abstract teaching to a specific church he could never say “*we*” as he was not a member of that particular church body. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 he speaks of it abstractly and uses the plural pronoun “*we*” but in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 where he applies it to the church at Corinth he drops “*we*” and uses “*ye*.” Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 12:13-26, he speaks of the body metaphor abstractly and uses “*we*,” but when it comes to applying it concretely in 1 Corinthians 12:27, he drops “*we*” and inserts “*ye*.”

F. Generic Body

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Savior of the body. – Eph. 5:23 (emphasis mine)

The generic is a subclass of the abstract use of nouns. The generic use of a term is when the term is used in the singular with the definite article (the) but includes each and every individual of that kind or class. For instance, notice in the text above that “*the husband*” and “*the wife*” are used generically. No particular husband or wife is being addressed, but rather, it includes all who fit those descriptions. If the reader is “a” husband or “a” wife, it applies concretely to each as readers. No one would ever rationalize, that Paul must be referring to some new kind of universal, invisible husband, or wife, just because no specific husband, or wife, is identified. However, this is exactly the kind of rationalization used by those who embrace the universal invisible church theory.

Notice that Paul says “*even as*” the husband and the wife so is Christ and the Church. The contextual theme is submission to authority in the sphere of sanctification. The husband is the head over the wife. This does not mean that the torso of the wife has no literal physical head upon her and that the literal physical head of the husband is somehow transplanted upon her or organically united to her. No, the term “*head*” simply refers to authority. The context is simply talking about the position of authority in the sphere of sanctification. There is no spiritual organic union between the “*head*” of the husband and the torso of the wife. Likewise, there is no spiritual organic union between Christ and the torso of the church. Christ is in the position of authority over His church. Church membership has to do with sanctification not salvation. In salvation there is spiritual union between Christ and the individual believer (obtained by regeneration and justification) but the metaphor of the body is never used for that. The metaphor of a “*body*” infers unity among the members under the authority of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul tells them that the “*head*” of “*the woman*” is “*the man*” just as the “*head*” of every man is Christ. Again, Paul is not referring to a change in the physical anatomy of the woman or some kind of organic union between the physical head of Christ and the torso of the man. No physical head is being united to, nor transplanted upon the woman or the man. Neither is Paul implying that somehow the physical head of Christ is somehow transplanted upon billions of male bodies. However, this is exactly the rationale used by those who embrace the universal invisible church theory when we say that Christ is “*the head*” of each of his churches. They ignore it is a metaphor for authority but literalize it and say that makes Christ a polygamist, or that it creates a monstrosity of many physical bodies all sharing one physical head. This is not only a failure to understand simple metaphors but a clear demonstration of abuse of metaphors.

Christ is the authority over every man just as Christ is the authority over every one of his churches even as the husband is the authority over his own wife.

It is failure to understand simple metaphors used with the generic or abstract sense that distorts such passages as Ephesians 1:22-23:

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.

Notice that Christ is “*the head*” not only to “*the church*” but also “*over all things.*” Universal invisible advocates interpret “the head” to be spiritual union between Christ and the church. However, this would teach pantheism as Christ is also said to be “*the head*” over “*all things*” as well.¹ If **spiritual organic union** is what Paul intends by “*the head*” then this would teach that Christ is in spiritual union with “*all things*” thus making Christ and creation to be one and that is **pantheism**. This is what happens when simple metaphors are abused and misused.

The metaphor of “*the head*” simply means **authority** and when the term **authority** is substituted for “*the head*” it makes perfect sense:

*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the authority over **all things** to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*
(emphasis mine)

¹ Much of these thoughts were borrowed from Charles L. Hunt’s excellent book, “*The Body of Christ: Separating Myth from Metaphor*” published by Grace Baptist Church Printing Outreach, Florence, KY in 2006

He is the final authority over the church as well as over all things. Some still stumble at the second phrase “*Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all*”. The church used generically, has reference to each and every one of His churches, each of which are a metaphorical “*body*” of Christ. Christ is the final authority over all his churches, as explicitly demonstrated in Revelation 2-3 where He addresses them as the final authority. They go about doing the work of the ministry in their own locality, just as Christ went about doing the work of the ministry when he was in his own physical body while on earth. What does it mean “*the fullness of him that filleth all and all*”? The church acts in Christ’s behalf upon earth and is the final administrative authority He has established upon earth for kingdom affairs. This is made clear in Matthew 18:17 in the words, “*tell it to the church*” in connection with the keys of the kingdom in verse 18. This is also made clear in Matthew 28:17-20 in the giving of the Great Commission. Hence, the meaning of the passage above, is that Christ is the final authority over his churches, as He is over all things, but the churches represent the fullness of His authority on earth in the administration of His kingdom affairs. Thus the authority of Christ “*filleth all in all*” over creation and in the administration of His kingdom on earth.

Some still object to the generic use of “*the church*” in these passages because they never find plural **bodies** of Christ used in Scripture. They reason, if “*the church*” is used generically in such passages as Ephesians 1:22-23, then we should read of plural “bodies” of Christ, just as we read of plural “churches” of Christ. However, this is a failure again to understand the restrictive use of metaphors. Remember, the metaphor “*body of Christ*” can only transfer concepts that characterize the literal physical body of Christ. The literal physical body of Christ does not have a plurality of **bodies** or **heads**, and therefore such language as “*bodies of Christ*” or “*Christ is the heads*” violates the limitations of a metaphor. However, the generic sense grammatically provides a way for this metaphor to be applied to each church without violating the proper rules that govern the use of a metaphor. Each church is a body of Christ with members in particular, just as Paul explicitly states in 1 Corinthians 12:27.²

G. Baptized Body

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. – 1 Cor. 12:13

The above text is the most singularly used text by universal invisible church advocates to support their doctrine. However, will the overall context support their application of this text?

First, we will examine the overall context of the letter and then the specific and immediate context in which this text is found.

Paul begins this letter by dealing with a specific issue that had divided the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10) into party divisions. This issue was the administrator of water baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Because they were so divided over the administrators of water baptism, Paul thanked God

² There is no definite article (the) in the Greek text in 1 Cor. 12:27. Literally it reads “Now ye are **a** body of Christ and members in particular.” The same is true in Ephesians 2:20-21 “In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto **a** holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for **a** habitation of God through the Spirit.” The church at Corinth is equally called “**a**” temple of God in I Cor. 3:16 as there is no definite article in the Greek text. The same is true in 1 Cor. 3:9 where the church at Corinth is “**a**” husbandry and “**a**” building of God.

that he had not baptized many of them as he did not want to be responsible for such division (1 Cor. 1:14-16). Paul went on to demonstrate that they had their priorities confused, as it is the gospel rather than water baptism that is most significant (1 Cor. 1:15-31). However, fearing that they would further divide over the particular preacher responsible for bringing them the gospel he went on to show that there was no basis for the preacher to brag or boast, but it was the Spirit of God where the power of the gospel resides (1 Cor. 2). In chapter three he directly deals with the division over the human instruments used by God the Holy Spirit in building the church at Corinth through preaching the gospel and baptizing them. In verses 1-4 he condemns them as “*carnal*” rather than “*spiritual*” due to making such distinctions and dividing over such human instruments. In verses 5-9 he directly deals with the basis for their divisions. First, he asks them this question:

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos? – v. 5

Then he proceeds to give them this answer:

but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. – vv. 5-7

Paul makes it clear that these administrators of baptism all work under the leadership of one boss – God the Holy Spirit. Then, he proceeds to deal a death blow to their division over the various human administrators of water baptism by stating such administrators are all “*one*”, because they work together as “*one*,” with God the Holy Spirit:

*Now he that planteth and he that watereth are **one**: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers **together with God**: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. – vv. 8-9 (emphasis mine)*

Paul immediately proceeds to illustrate this principle by the fact that he was the master builder used by God to lay the foundation for the church at Corinth in verse 10.

Therefore under the leadership of the Holy Spirit these men were used by God to gospelize, baptize and form them into “*the temple of God*” at Corinth (v. 16).

Thus excluding the human instruments Paul tells them “*Ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building...Ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you*” (vv. 9,16) and later he will tell them “*Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular*” (1 Cor. 12:13).

What is his point and what is his solution to their party division over the particular administrator of their water baptism? It was God the Holy Spirit that brought them to faith in the gospel, and it was God the Holy Spirit that led them to receive water baptism and it was God the Holy Spirit that sent the ministers to them and the ministry together with God the Holy Spirit acted as one because they were under the direct leadership of the Spirit of God. This truth ends all bickering and divisions over particular human instruments used by God in their salvation and baptism. What was true of the church at Corinth is true of all New Testament churches and their individual members, For under the leadership of One Spirit were we all water baptized into one kind of body, regardless of our earthly race or class distinctions and were made to partake of His

indwelling presence that characterize all His true churches as temples of the Holy Spirit, houses of God and the pillar and ground of the truth.

Now, let's look at the immediate context in which 1 Corinthians 12:13 is found. Again, we have a problem over division of spiritual gifts. They are ignorant concerning spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:1). Previous to their salvation they were under the leadership of demonic spirits in their idolatrous worship services:

Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. – 1 Cor. 12:2 (emphasis mine)

It is in direct contrast to this leadership of demonic spirits in idolatrous worship services that Paul proceeds to illustrate the difference between then and now. Significantly, the word used to make this contrasting parallel is the preposition “**by**” which is the translation of the Greek preposition **en** in verse 3:

*Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking **by** the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but **by** the Holy Ghost.* – v. 3 (emphasis mine)

When they were under the leadership of demonic spirits they could say Jesus was accursed and they could not truthfully say Jesus is Lord, but now in contrast, “**by**” or **under the leadership of** The Holy Spirit they cannot say Jesus is accursed and they can say Jesus is Lord. Hence, Paul establishes what he means by the word “**by**” or the Greek preposition **en** at the very beginning of this context. He means **under the leadership of**, or **by direction of**, or **by means of**, the Holy Spirit.

Consider the above in light of John 4:1-2. In John 4:1 the apostle says that Jesus baptized and made more disciples than John. However, in John 4:2 it is clarified that Jesus Himself never baptized anyone, but that His disciples administered such baptisms. That is, these baptisms were administered under the leadership, direction and authority of Jesus Christ. They are attributed to Him (v. 1) but actually administered by those under his leadership (v. 2). Jesus promised the church that He would send “**another Comforter**” or the Holy Spirit to them (Jn. 16:13) who would “**lead them**” into all things. Like the first Comforter, the second Comforter would “**lead them**” in regard to the administration of baptism (I Corinthians 3:8-9) and building churches. Hence, just as the administration of water baptism was attributed to the first Comforter (John 4:1) but actually administered under his leadership by His disciples (Jn. 4:2) so likewise water baptism is directly attributed to the second Comforter (1 Cor. 12:13) but is actually administered under His leadership by His ministers (1 Cor. 3:8-9).

Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 3:1-16 established how the church was built as the temple of the Spirit of God. It was built by the “**master builder**” Paul and then built up by others but all under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. They worked together with the Holy Spirit as “**one**” in building this church as the “**temple of God.**” Hence, the church at Corinth was formed under the leadership, or “**by one Spirit**” whereby they were all water baptized into one body, one temple, one husbandry, one building, by that same Spirit. The emphasis on another Comforter is leadership.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12 Paul introduces the physical human body first as a simile (“**as**”) and then as a metaphor (“**is**”) for the church, just as he did in Romans 12:4:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. – I Cor. 12:12

For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: – Rom. 12:4

Notice first of all that it is the physical human body that is first introduced in both passages. Notice the word “as” in both passages – “*For as the body is one*” and “*For as we have many members in one body*”. Second, notice that he does not use plural bodies when speaking of the human body but rather the generic sense “*the body*” (1 Cor. 12:12) and “*one body*” (Rom. 12:4) but with the plural pronoun “*we*” (Rom. 12:4). Now, does that mean Paul was trying to teach that “*we*” all share **one physical human body in common with each other** or that “*we*” all share **one common kind of physical human body with each other**? Obviously, he is using the generic sense with the plural pronoun “*we*”. Likewise he transfers this same generic use with the plural pronoun directly over to the metaphorical application to the church as the body of Christ in Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, as he explicitly says “*so also is Christ.*” That is, just as New Testament believers all shared in common one kind of physical human body with many members, they also shared in common one kind of metaphorical church body with many members as all of them had, under the leadership of The Holy Spirit, been water baptized into such a body, regardless of ethnic and class distinctions, and thereby made to partake of the special presence of the Holy Spirit, manifested in unity, in spiritual gifts and doctrinal and practical truth.

In the New Testament era all believers that Paul wrote to were members of New Testament churches that were like faith and order with each other. This is the undeniable historical context of “*we.*” Hence, Paul could say “*we*” when addressing what they all had in common. However, when Paul comes to applying this generic truth to the particular church at Corinth he drops the “*we*” and says “*ye*” (1 Cor. 12:27) because he was not a member of the church at Corinth, but his membership was in the church at Antioch from whence he was sent out (Ac. 13:1-4).

This interpretation is the only interpretation that provides a practical solution to the division in the church at Corinth, or the division that might occur within any true church of Christ. This interpretation equally applies to division over spiritual gifts. It is under the leadership of the Spirit that gifts are to be exercised. Think about this. What does the Universal Invisible church interpretation of this text provide in the way of any practical solution for division within this church at Corinth or any other church????? Can the Universal Invisible church interpretation provide any kind of practical solution for division among its members? Name any time in history that such an interpretation effected unity among all Christians living upon earth, as described in 1 Corinthians 12:25-26? No, the universal invisible church theory has never been a source for unity, but just the reverse. It has been the doctrinal source for increasing division and disunity.

In closing, let it be noted that the historic Baptist interpretation of 1 Corinthians 12:13 among Baptists before 1680 was unanimous that this text referred to water baptism and the membership in the local church.

H. Authorized Body

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. - Eph. 1:22-23

Those who interpret the metaphorical “*head*” and “*body*” relationship between Christ and the church to be an organic union in which Christ is the physical head and the church to be the physical body have a tremendous problem with this text.

Paul uses the metaphor “*head*” to establish the authority of Christ “*over all things.*” Hence, Christ is “*the head*” over all things as much as He is the “*head*” over the church which is His **metaphorical** “*body.*” If the **metaphor** of “*head*” infers organic spiritual union with the church body then it equally infers organic spiritual union with Christ and “*all things,*” as He is equally the “*head*” over both. However, that would teach **pantheism** making Christ spiritually united with “*all things.*”

Although spiritual union is a Biblical concept that is found in the doctrines of regeneration and justification, it is not inferred or implied in the “*head*” and “*body*” **metaphors**. Remember, the proper use of **metaphors** can only convey characteristics that are actually found in the relationship between the literal “*head*” and “*body.*” In the literal physical relationship between the “*head*” and “*body*” both are mutually dependent upon each other for life. If you cut off the literal “*head*” from the literal “*body*” both mutually die as one cannot be sustained without the other. To apply these metaphors to spiritual union would teach that Jesus Christ is as much dependent upon the body for spiritual life as the body is dependent upon Christ for spiritual life. The Bible does not teach such a thing.

Spiritual union between Christ and believers may be **metaphorically** expressed by the vine and branch metaphor. If the branches are severed from the vine, only the branches die, as the vine is sustained by its own inherent and separate life principle.

The **metaphors** of “*head*” and “*body*” merely convey the idea of final authority, direction, and leadership by Christ and submission to that leadership by the church. In every context where the **metaphors** “*head*” and “*body*” are found the subject is progressive sanctification not salvation.

What Ephesians 1:22-23 actually teaches is that Christ possesses final authority over “*all things.*” On planet earth His authority is visibly manifested in and through the church. The New Testament church is the visible expression of the Kingdom (rule) of God on earth and possesses the “*keys of the kingdom*” (Mt. 18:17-18) which symbolizes Christ’s authority. Jesus expresses this authority in the church when he said:

***Tell it to the church...** Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever **ye** shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever **ye** shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. – Mt. 18:17, 18 (emphasis mine)*

When authorizing the church to carry out the Great Commission Jesus prefaced it by saying “*all power is given me in heaven and in earth.*” On planet earth His authority is manifested in and through the church, as His temple.

*Know ye not that **ye are the temple of God**, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? – 1 Cor. 3:16 (emphasis mine)*

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular – 1 Cor. 12:27
(emphasis mine)

In the preceding context of Ephesians 1:22-23 Paul has just declared that God has set Christ above all principalities in heavenly places. The extent of His authority not only reaches in this world but the world to come. The present manifestation of that authority in “*this world*” is in His institutional church which is His metaphorical body:

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. – Eph. 1:19-23