

One Body in Christ

Introduction

Good morning. It has been a year since I last had the opportunity to share with everyone here, and I thank the Lord for that privilege of being able to share again the word of God with you. Last year I spoke about “unity” from our special Bible verse for 2011, **Ephesians 4:3**

Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.

This year, the verse the elders chose for the church is from Colossians chapter 3, verses 15-17. These verses reflect a theme of thankfulness. Last week Pastor Schaeffer didn't preach on these verses and I considered speaking on the theme of thankfulness as we start the new year and we thank the Lord for his many blessings. But as I reflected on these verses, particularly the first verse, **Colossians 3:15** I was struck by some similarities to last year's verse.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.

Particularly I was struck by the phrase “as members of one body”.

Viewing the Church as a Body

How do you view the church? In particular, how do you view its local manifestation - that is Kawaguchi Christ Church? Some people might think of it as a family, and in some respects that is not a bad analogy, since we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. Some people might think of Kawaguchi Christ church as a club, where we meet weekly for our regular “club” activities. We might even look at this verse and think of ourselves as “members” of this club. Some people might even think of the church as a company, especially when we come to deal with money, expenses and income and have to produce a balanced budget to work with each year. Perhaps the elders and those in a position of leadership in the church often might fall into thinking this way about the church. But I think one of the important ways that the Christians are described in the New Testament is as described in **Colossians 3:15** where we are described as “members of one body”.

Now we should be clear that the word “member” can mean “One that belongs to a group or an organization” but this is not the sense that is meant in this verse, it is another meaning of the word, that is “A part or an organ of a human or animal body, a limb, such as an arm or a leg”

This is made clear when we look at other passages in the Bible that speak about us as members of the body of Christ. Let's look briefly at **Romans 12:4-5**.

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Diversity as parts of a Body

Paul is using the example of our own body to help us understand that although we are all different, we have different gifts and ways of working within the church we are all part one living organism. We are all interconnected.

Kawaguchi Christ Church is perhaps even more diverse than many other churches in our local area. Please have a look around at the people here today. Were we all born in the same country - no (Japan, Australia, America, Nigeria, Korea, China). We probably don't even come from the same area within Japan! How many people were born and raised in Kawaguchi? Do we all speak the same language - no (Japanese, English, Korean, Chinese, Tagalog ...). Were we all raised in Christian homes - no. Are we of similar age groups -no. Do we have similar political views - no. Do we have similar income levels or education - no. In fact, by any measure possible, we are probably a group of people who could reasonably be expected to have nothing in common!

So it is quite clear that Paul is correct when he says that we are all different. We are not only different in our composition, what we are made of, but we are also different in what functions and what we do within the

church. God has made each one of us unique, and given us a set of unique gifts to be used for the benefit of others. Romans 12:6-8 looks at some of those gifts. Do you know what your gifts are? This morning I don't want to focus on what each person's gifts are but rather to ask each person here today to reflect on what gifts God has given them and how they can be used in the church. Perhaps it is helpful to look over Romans 12 or 1 Cor. 12. to get an idea of some of the possible gifts the Bible talks about. Another helpful idea may be to think about the analogy of a body. Are you an arm, reaching out to others and pulling them close to Christ? Perhaps you are a leg, running with the Gospel to new areas? Perhaps you are an internal organ, not often thought of but vital to the functioning of the body as a whole? But probably one thing that is not helpful to do is to look around you and compare yourself to others, because they will likely be a different member of the body than yourself.

Belonging to each other

The last part of the verse **Romans 12:5** is also important and deserves attention.

and each member belongs to all the others.

So not only are we all different and serving God in different ways, but we belong to each other. Have another look around the church again at the people gathered here today. You belong to all the people here. There is diversity in God's church, but there also inter-dependence as each member relies on other members to do their tasks and duties to support the body as a whole.

This is also stated clearly in **1 Cor. 12:25** where it is said that each part of the body should have equal concern for each other.

When the body works as one

When each member of the body is working as it should, great things can be done. I like to imagine a well functioning body as a top athlete. Each motion is honed to produce the best, fastest performance. When I was in high school I joined the athletics club, and at one stage was running in the 800m event. I remember being very surprised one day when our coach was telling us how important it was pump our arms harder in order to run faster. Not only do legs need to be conditioned to run faster, but also arms and indeed many other parts of the body as well - the lungs need to be able to take in more oxygen in order for the blood to transport that to the other parts of the body.

In top athletes every part of their body, even those that are not immediately obvious are finely tuned to make sure that they can deliver the best performance possible.

When one member is sick (1 Cor. 12:26)

Conversely, when one member of the body is sick, every part of the body suffers. **1 Cor. 12:26** says

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.

So not only should we be concerned with our own part in the body and contributing to the body as a whole, but we should also be concerned with all the other parts of the body.

One person observed that "In the body of the Christ there are no private sufferings". This demands sympathy and sensitivity to fellow Christians to share in the joys and sorrows of each person.

It is not always obvious with sickness where the illness occurs. I sometimes suffer from very bad headaches. In Australia, sometimes I would return home from school and literally have to lie down - I couldn't do anything, not eat or study. In many cases I was vomiting from the severity of the headaches. In my case, the cause of the headaches was too much bright sunlight. Perhaps I have sensitive eyes but I had to make sure to wear sunglasses when I was outdoors, in order to protect my eyes from too much bright light. In this example, one small organ of the body is affected, and the affliction spreads to the rest of the body - the whole body feels the effect of the suffering.

It is the same in the church - one sensitive part of the body of Christ might cause the whole of the body to stop functioning properly. It might not be a very nice image, but can you imagine Kawaguchi Christ Church as someone vomiting their insides out. Whatever the reason it is not a pretty sight! We should endeavor to make sure that any part of the body does not suffer as much as possible. It might be carrying the analogy too far, but I wonder what we might suggest as the medicine in this case? Prayer?

Christ, the Head of the Body (Ephesians 4:15,16)

While there are many parts to the body, there is no disputing modern medicine has decreed that the brain controls all the functions of the body. If we are all members of the body, then who is the controlling member? It would be unfortunate if we all wanted to be the controlling brain, or mind, and our goal was to to make the other parts of the body do our will!

Eph. 4:15-16 says

We will in all things grow up in him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

First, the growth of the body of Christ is comprehensive, “in all things” will we grow up in Christ. In what kind of things? In faith, knowledge, unity, and in love.

Secondly, the goal of the growth has Christ as its goal, we are to “grow up in him”. We are to become more and more like him. We are to become fully incorporated into him. Paul also includes himself in this verse “*We will ...*”

Thirdly, Christ is the source of its growth, since the passage states that “From him” we grow and build itself up.

Finally, the focus on these verses is not the individual growth, but the growth of the body of Christ as a whole. In fact, as each part of the body of Christ does their work, this contributes to the growth of the whole. The body is not a formless mass growing larger and larger, but has a specific function, with each part joined and held together with ligaments (which are the tissue which connects bones to other bones)

Those not yet part of the Body

Finally, to those people here today who haven’t made a commitment to Christ, I encourage you all to consider becoming part of the body of Christ.

Conclusion

We know then, that we are all

Members of the body of Christ

Christ is the head of the Body

Work together for the good of the Body using our God-given gifts

Be concerned for the other members of the Body

Grow into Christ, from Christ, in all things

However, there is one thing we should not forget. It is only in love that the body increases, and it is only in love that true Christian ministry will contribute to the building of the body. Love is the criterion for the church’s true growth.

Following the passage in 1 Cor. 12 we read today, there is one of the most famous passages about love in the Bible, that is 1 Cor. 13. I'd like to read that to conclude today's message.