

# DISCIPLESHIP. SUPPLEMENT 14

## [FELLOWSHIP]

### THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST IS INDISPENSIBLE

**Question.** Is it possible for a Christian to grow and to serve without the worldwide Church or local church?

1. There are only two persons that function as a head of a body that represents a group of people on earth.

**Read** Romans 5:17-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22,45.

(1) The two heads that represent all people on earth.

Adam is the head of the body that represents all lost people (lost mankind). Christ is the Head of the Body that represents all saved people (the Church). Adam is the head of the human race in the whole world. Christ is the Head of the worldwide Church and the Head of every individual congregation in the whole world. The community of believers in the whole world is called “the Body of Christ” in the Bible (Ephesians 1:22) or “the one worldwide Christian Church” in the Apostolic Confession.

The first Adam. Acts 17:26 says, “From one blood (one man) he made every nation of men.” The first human being is the representative head of the old humanity which consists of all the natural but fallen people everywhere in the world and throughout the history of the world.

The second Adam. Jesus Christ is the Representative Head of the new humanity, which consists of all who believed in the coming Messiah during the Old Testament period and all who believe in Jesus Christ since his first coming. Jesus Christ is thus the Head of all who believe in Jesus Christ on earth and throughout human history. The whole purpose for which Jesus Christ came to the earth was to restore lost mankind to fellowship with the one and only God (1 Peter 3:18)!

(2) The body shares in the life of its head.

All people that are bound to the first Adam. The whole human race shares in the fall into sin of the first Adam. All people that are connected to the first Adam by birth share in his fall into sin (Job 14:4; Psalm 51:5), his death (Romans 5:12,17) and his doom (condemnation) (Romans 5:18).

All people that are bound to the second Adam. The whole Church shares in the righteousness (salvation), which Jesus Christ earned. All people connected to the second Adam by faith, are saved from God’s wrath and are reconciled to God (Romans 5:9-10). All people connected to the second Adam by spiritual rebirth share in his righteousness, his new life (Romans 5:14-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22) and his eternal life (John 3:16). “Jesus Christ ...has become...our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

2. There are only two communities in the world.

There are consequently only two communities of people in the world. Every person belongs to one of these communities. “The field is the world” (Matthew 13:38).

(1) The community of unbelievers is called “the world”.

“The (wicked) world” (1 John 2:15-17) is also called “the dominion of darkness” (Colossians 1:13; cf. 1 John 5:19b).

“The weeds are the sons of the evil one and the enemy who sows them is the devil” (Matthew 13:38-39).

(2) The community of believers in Jesus Christ is called “the Church”.

“The (world wide) Church” (Matthew 16:18) is called “the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 5:23) or “the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:25-26) in the New Testament. The Church is “not of the world”, but is “still in the world” (John 17:14-16). The Church is in the world “the light” that shines in the darkness and “the salt” that cleanses the earth, protects it against rotting away and gives it taste (Matthew 5:14-16). “The good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom”. “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man” (Matthew 13:37-38).

3. Assurance of salvation is experienced within the Body of Christ.

(1) Salvation is possible only in Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, “I am the Way. ... No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we *must* be saved” (Acts 4:12). “If anyone is in Christ, he *is* a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17)! This is the testimony: “He who has the Son *has life*. He who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-13).

(2) Assurance of salvation is experienced in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

“To be in Christ” has a spiritual and practical meaning.

*Spiritually* “in Christ” means on the one hand the position or state of righteousness and holiness (1 Corinthians 1:30), which Jesus Christ has imputed (ascribed, credited) to the believer and on the other hand the process of sanctification or lifestyle which the Holy Spirit works within the believer. The Holy Spirit continually applies this righteousness and holiness to the personal life of the believer (Romans 8:5-17; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

*Practically* “in Christ” means also that the believer is bound to the one worldwide Community of believers or the worldwide Christian Church. The Holy Spirit is present within the body of the believer (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20) and also within the worldwide Church (the Body of Christ) (Ephesians 2:19-22). The Holy Spirit represents “the presence of Jesus Christ himself” in both!

(3) Assurance of salvation is experienced through functioning in the Body of Christ.

When a person is saved from the power of darkness and is brought into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13), then his presence in the kingdom of Christ and his functioning in the kingdom of Christ is the way in which the Christian experiences the assurance of his salvation. When a person is baptised by one Spirit into the Body of Christ (is born-again, regenerated)(1 Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5-6), his membership of the Body of Christ and his functioning within the Body of Christ is the basis of assurance that he shares in the new life of the Holy Spirit.

It is not only through the personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but also through his functioning in the Body of Christ that the Christian experiences the assurance of salvation. “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light and there is nothing in him to make him stumble” (1 John 2:9-10). It is impossible to separate the relationship of a Christian to his brother from his relationship to Christ! It is impossible to separate the Body of Christ (the worldwide Church) from its Head (Jesus Christ)! Likewise it is impossible to experience assurance of salvation apart from loving Christians in your own congregation and in other churches/congregations.

Christ together with his Body (the Church) is the perfect gift of Jesus Christ to Christians, through which they not only have a share in the righteousness (salvation) and holiness which Jesus Christ acquired in their place, but may also experience the assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ.

#### 4. Joining Jesus Christ is at the same time joining the Body of Christ.

The expression “a new man” is repeated several times in the Bible, but with three different meanings.

(1) “The new man” refers to Jesus Christ, the Christian and the Christian Church.

The context determines the meaning.

The new man refers to Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:47). “The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:47). The first man was Adam and came forth from the dust (that is, the created elements) of the earth. The second man is Christ and came from heaven (that is, the uncreated dwelling of God).

The new man refers to the Christian (Romans 6:2-7; Ephesians 4:20-24). “The old man” refers to the *unregenerate* nature of the unbeliever. It is *the natural man* who chose freely to be *a slave of his sinful nature* (Romans 6:16) and completely ruled by his sinful nature (Romans 8:6-8).

The new man refers to the *regenerate* nature of the Christian. By faith in Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation the old unregenerate nature is once for all put off and the regenerate nature is once for all put on (Ephesians 4:22,24. The old man and the new man cannot exist at the same time!

Putting off and putting on (Ephesians 4:22,24)<sup>1</sup> is here not a continuing process, but a once for all and definite break with the old sinful fellowship (the world) and a once for all and definite joining with the new holy fellowship (the Church). It means exactly the same as being rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the kingdom of Christ” (Colossians 1:13). Note that Ephesians 4:1-16 and Colossians 3:15 speak about the one Body of Christ, while Colossians 3:9-11 speaks about the Jewish and non-Jewish members of that Body.

The new man refers to the Christian Church (Ephesians 2:15-16). Jesus Christ took the believers from the two fellowships of Jews and non-Jews, both of which came forth from Adam, and created in himself “one new man” out of the two. The new man refers to “the one Body of Christ” or “the one worldwide Christian Church”, which consists of believers in Christ in the world throughout history. In this Body of Christ he reconciled Jewish Christians and non-Jewish Christians with God and with each other. It means that “the new man” is much more than an individual person who has been justified and sanctified in Christ. “The new man” is the one community (the one worldwide Church) that has been justified and sanctified in Christ (Ephesians 2:15-16; cf. John 10:16). The new man is the Body of Christ into

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<sup>1</sup> The verbs are in the aorist tense.

which the Holy Spirit baptises every individual Christian and thus incorporates (literally: in-bodies) them (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Beyond the borders of this new man (the Body of Christ, the worldwide Church) only the old man or old humanity with its discord and disruption exist. The individual Christian cannot be a part of the Head, Jesus Christ, unless he is also a part of the Body, the worldwide Christian Church.

(2) You only become a new man in connection to Christ and the Christian Church.

“In Christ the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9) and “the fullness of Jesus Christ dwells in the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23)! Thus, only when individual believers are in the Head, Jesus Christ, and thus also in the Body of Christ, the Christian Church, “are they filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 3:7-21; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-3).

Conclusion.

“The new man” is therefore Christ, the Body of Christ (the Church) and the born-again Christian. We cannot separate the Christian from being a part of the Body of Christ from the Christian being a part of its Head, Jesus Christ. We cannot suggest Christ being only in heaven and the Body of Christ being only a human organisation on earth. We must view the Body of Christ, not primarily as being an organisation of people on earth, but as an organism that is inseparable from Christ in heaven (thus, omnipresent, Matthew 28:20)! “The heavenly Jerusalem (the Jerusalem that is above) is the mother of all Christians”<sup>2</sup> who are already in heaven with Christ and all Christians who, though registered in heaven, are still on earth (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:23). It is not possible to have a personal relationship with Christ (the Head) in heaven, and at the same time refuse to relate to the Church (the Body of Christ) on earth! “Being in Christ” always means “being also in the Body of Christ” It is not possible to be an individual Christian and *continue to refuse* to join or participate with the worldwide Christian Church or the local church/congregation. Remember the words: “Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him” (1 John 2:11).

##### 5. Joining the Body of Christ means no longer living independent or for oneself.

(1) Members of the Body of Christ are inseparably connected to the Body.

“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” (Romans 12:4-5). When people become Christians, they are baptised (incorporated) by one Holy Spirit into the one Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Thus, every individual in the world is either “still in the world outside the Body of Christ” or “in Christ and in the Body of Christ”! Every human being is “still under the dominion of darkness” or “in the kingdom of Christ” (Colossians 1:13). Every person is either “still a lost son or lost daughter wasting their lives in the world” or “a found son or daughter who has become a member of God’s family” Every human being is either “still spiritually dead” (Ephesians 2:1) or “already made spiritually alive” (Ephesians 2:5; Luke 15:11-24).

(2) Members of the Body of Christ cannot function apart from the Body.

The worldwide Church consists of many Christians and many local congregations that are inseparably connected to one another. There is one Body of Christ, but many different members. An individual cannot transcend his own individuality. An individual Christian functioning as “a hand” can never take the place of another individual Christian functioning as “an eye”. The human hand and the human eye can only be what they are as long as they function within the human body. Likewise, Christians functioning as “a hand” or “an eye” can only be what they are and do what do as long as they stay connected to the Body of Christ and function within the Body of Christ. Outside the Body of Christ (of which the Head is most important), a Christian cannot live and cannot function! Imagine a human hand or a human eye trying to function without being connected to the rest of the body (and of course to the human head)!

An individual who separates himself from the Church (the Body of Christ) cannot live as a Christian! The Christian life means being bound to Christ and thus also bound to his Body. It means that the Christian no longer lives independent or for himself, but that Jesus Christ through his Spirit lives his life in and through the believer (Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

Jesus Christ lives his life in and through the Christian (Galatians 2:20), in and through the Christian marriage (Ephesians 5:25-30), in and through the Christian family, in and through the Christian at the place he works (Ephesians 6:5-9), and in and through the local congregation and in and through the worldwide Christian Church. Christians are exhorted “to be Spirit-filled or Christ-filled continually” (Ephesians 5:18) and “whatever he does, to do it all dependent on the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17) and “to work at it with all his heart as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23).

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<sup>2</sup> A particular denomination (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church) is NOT “the mother” of all Christians!