

Corinthians 12:12 - 13:1 ¹² For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. ¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? ²⁰ But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. ²³ And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, ²⁴ but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that *part* which lacks it, ²⁵ that there should be no schism in the body, but *that* the members should have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with *it*. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ²⁸ And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ²⁹ *Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?* ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

"The Body in the Spirit"

I have had a very eclectic history of church involvement; been around the barn so to speak. I was baptized Presbyterian, yet my family's attendance at church was in sporadic spurts. Therefore, I don't know what it is like to grow up in a church-every-Sunday home. Because of that, did it mean that I did not belong to the Body of Christ? When I was seven my parents divorced and felt outcast and shamed by the church. Did this mean we did not belong to the Body of Christ? After that, the church I saw the most of was my best friend's church. It was a small little Presbyterian congregation that could almost be called a mountain church. Because I was there as an adopted guest of my best friend's family and that Ronnie and I spent many of those Sunday's sleeping in the balcony or in the car, did that mean that I did not belong to the Body of Christ?

In my teenage years I attended church mostly with my girlfriend. I wasn't necessarily going of my own will though I didn't mind going. Church attendance was a pre-requisite for spending Sunday afternoon with my girlfriend. Because my attendance wasn't whole-hearted, did that mean I did not belong to the Body of Christ? From age sixteen to nineteen I didn't have a problem with Jesus, but I thought that Christians were largely judgmental, self-righteous hypocrites

claiming to be a moral majority while being neither. I believed that mostly because I felt like I didn't belong in their midst as I wasn't there as a part of a family and my own family was broken, which was something I felt ashamed of and very angry about. Yet, it wasn't just me. My experience of church was not one where the love among the people was strong enough, evident enough, outreaching enough to touch my shame and overcome it so that I felt like I belonged. They just seemed like social clubs with a Jesus agenda. Because I felt this way did it mean that I did not belong to the Body of Christ? Did my sense of not belonging in the Body mean I did not belong to the Body of Christ?

Well, when I was nineteen my sense of not belonging became universal. I felt like I didn't belong in life. By the grace of God, Jesus out of the blue became someone I really wanted to find. “Jesus Loves Me This I know” was planted deeper in me than I realized by these Christians among whom I felt I didn't belong. He suddenly became someone I wanted to know. So off I went every Sunday of my own volition to that little Presbyterian church with my best friend's mom. Did this new desire mean I suddenly began to belong to the Body of Christ? The Pastor at that church was a bit whacked out on end-times stuff. He said that the world I felt I didn't belong in was going to end in damnation and very soon. That was easy for me to believe. I too had judged the world damned and by sharing belief in that common judgment and judgmentalism I began to feel like I belonged. Did that mean I belonged to the Body of Christ?

Next, I met a girl who introduced me to her Nazarene Church. She said I should attend there because the church I went to was “Spiritually dead”. She must have been right for as soon as I walked into the worship service in that elementary school cafeteria I felt the presence of the Lord for what I thought was the first time. I was hooked and left the Presbyterian Church to be a Nazarene and to go into the ministry. Because I was now “Spiritually alive” and attending a “Spirit-filled church”, did this mean I now belonged to the Body of Christ? While I was a Nazarene I found healing for the unforgiveness and anger I felt towards my parents for breaking up my family, my home. Did this healing mean I now belonged to the Body of Christ?

Well, in preparation for the ministry I began to attend a Mennonite university. While there I began to participate in a weekly Bible study and prayer group. We came from all walks of life with little in common other than being Christians who needed friends to share our needs, hurts, and problems with and pray for each other. We were a very small group of six and we ministered to each other. Those meetings were times when we knew without a doubt that we belonged to the Body of Christ. Unfortunately, such a rich experience made me feel as if we were “real” Christians at a school where we thought the larger student body was only Christian in name only. Did I now really belong to the Body of Christ more so than others? Oddly, we in the prayer group did nothing to associate with each other outside of our weekly gatherings.

Moving on, the more I studied the Bible and theology in college, I found my sense of belonging at the Nazarene church fading. The minister was very caught up in trying to build a big church with a prayer tower and showed little interest in my call to ministry. He let me preach once and I was immediately

confronted afterwards by an elder who accused me of not believing in a literal heaven and hell. The sermon was about evangelism being more sincere if we go about it by means of building friendships rather than trying to guilt or scare people into making a decision. After that my attendance there and anywhere became less regular. Did this fading mean I no longer belonged in the Body of Christ? I really liked the Mennonite people with their strong sense of community and mission, but my last name was not Miller, Yoder, Burkholder, or Schwartzendruber. Therefore, I would always feel “not quite Mennonite.” Did all this feeling of not belonging in a church mean I was no longer a member of the Body of Christ? Or, since I knew God was calling me to the ministry, was it that all these churches were really not true gatherings of the Body of Christ?

By this time I had met the woman who would become my first wife. She was probably as disillusioned about the church as I was if not more. But we kept searching. I suggested we try the Presbyterian church in the small, but growing town my parents lived in. I had often run by that church assuming them to be a “Spiritually dead” collection of gray heads, not really a part of the true Body of Christ. It was Easter when we first attended and we really liked it. The minister was a couple of years older than me and in the brief conversation we had I felt like this church was a place where my call and education would be appreciated. The congregation was a wonderful mix of young and old. They were very much into fellowship and Christian education. They even camped together. Beautifully, they were even friends outside of church. They shared a very genuine openness towards everyone. I really felt at home in that church. It wasn’t charismatic. There weren’t requirements on what you had to believe in order to belong there. They in no way distanced themselves from the community with judgmentalism. There were too many school teachers in their midst to cp that attitude. They were involved missionally both locally and globally. The majority of them even practiced their faith at home. It truly was a church where anyone could belong no matter your place or status in life. Considering where they were they could have very easily been just a small town clique church, yet they were vibrant, welcoming, joyful, and growing.

Finley Memorial was what I would call a Body in the Spirit. A lot of times, and I’m guilty of it, we say that the Holy spirit is someone who must come in and fill us. That’s a very individualistic way of thinking of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God surrounding, resting upon a congregation as if he were the air we breathe. Paul says we all drink of the Holy Spirit. I will change his word to breathe. Sometimes the air is thin. Sometimes it is sweet and rich. Sometimes it is hard to find the good air for the smog. Most times, it’s just air. So, it is with the Holy Spirit. He surrounds us like the air we breathe whether, thin, rich, polluted, or plain; he is here. To speak of the Body of Christ is to speak of the Body in the Spirit rather than the Spirit in the Body. Every church I have attended breathed the air of the Spirit even though some were less healthy. With me it was just that at one point God let me know I was breathing the Spirit.

At Finley Memorial the air was especially rich in the love of Christ. So are you folks. I really dig this church. We may be small and that is a limitation on us in some respects, but we are a part of the Body of Christ alive and breathing the

rich air of the Spirit. Everything I said about my home church can be said of this one. Friends, we are Spiritually alive and breathing sweet, rich air. Let it heal, restore, and invigorate us and drive us forward in mission. The Holy Spirit is here and every one of us is breathing it and that means every one of you belong here and are in the Body of Christ. Amen.