

THE BODY OF CHRIST

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 of Latter Day Saints
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SCRIPTURE READING: Selected verses from the 12th chapter of
 1st Corinthians, beginning with verse 12.

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. 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. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

"God hath put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Every particle of matter bespeaks the necessity for organization. Even the atom consists of a certain prescribed number of protons, neutrons, and electrons, arranged in a definite ratio, and in a definite relationship to each other. Without proper organizational relationship of part to part, there could not even be such a simple thing as a pair of scissors. Scissors consist of three parts, two blades and a bolt to hold them together. Remove any one of those three simple parts, or re-arrange the parts in haphazard order, and the scissors will no longer cut; they are no longer scissors, for scissors are implements for cutting. If you don't think organization and proper relationship of part to part are important, try putting the batteries into your flashlight upside down, and see whether you get any light. Try taking your watch apart and shaking up the pieces in a bag; then look at them to see what time it is, instead of at an organization of those pieces in proper functional relationship with each other.

In these illustrations it is simple to see the necessity for organization. Yet there are many sensible, intelligent people today who think that a church is any loose association of people of similar ideals, and that their organization, or their functional relationship to each other is inconsequential and unimportant. We submit to you that without organization, two blades and a bolt do not make a pair of scissors; a sack full of parts do not make a watch; a yard full of building materials does not make a house; and neither does a group of people without proper organization and structural relationship with each other, make a church.

Did Christ organize a church? It is the belief of most Christian people who have never had occasion to consider any other theory that the church was organized by accident, or out of necessity, on the day of Pentecost, with exactly 140 members, including Mary, Jesus' brethren, and 120 disciples. But Matthew 16:18 records Jesus' positive, purposeful statement, "I will build my church." Latter Day Saints believe that he began that project long before the day of Pentecost -- back in early Old Testament times, as a matter of fact. The original structure, life, and purpose of that early church were obscured by the rebellion of Israel and by the

hypocritical legalism of the Pharisees. When Jesus came to earth, he could find no remnants of his church, nor of that church's life. He rejected all the sects of his day and announced, "I will build my church." The word "build" implies that he was working to a definite plan, with a definite purpose; not haphazardly; and that the growth of the church was controlled and directed by the life and intelligence of his Spirit.

When the church began with the first member, it obviously could not have had all the organization which Christ intended the finished church to have. When human life starts from a single cell, it is not complete either; but there are life and intelligence and power in that single cell which will gather to itself more material, multiply cells, and eventually make a complete, adult man. The baby when he is born still does not have any teeth, but he has teeth buds which will some day become teeth. The infant lacks something in size, but he lacks nothing in organic structure. His body has at birth exactly the same organs and parts and members that it will have when he is mature. To be sure, cells will grow old and die and be replaced countless times before the infant becomes an adult, but in spite of all this constant change, the organization or structure of the body will remain the same. Barring accidents or surgery, every man at his death has exactly the same set of organs, the same number of arms and legs and fingers and toes which he had at birth, and all the organs, parts, and members of his body will still bear exactly the same relationship to each other that they did the day he was born.

When the New Testament church began with its first member, the life within that single cell had power to gather to itself other men and women, and to organize them in definite, precise relationship with each other. Though in the beginning stages of the church there were not enough members to fill all the offices which were included in Jesus' plans for the church, the potentialities were there; the life was there; the intelligence was there which would direct future growth. As the church grew, twelve apostles were chosen, and set in the church (1 Cor. 12:28). Later seventies were chosen and sent out; then as the need arose there came bishops and deacons and elders and evangelists and pastors.

No sooner had the life of the church begun than individual members began to die; but as they died, their places were filled up by the new members which were added to the church daily. Then came the time when the church lost one of its twelve apostles -- Judas; and the place of Judas was filled by Matthias. (Acts 1:26) Evidently this process of replacement continued in the church, for the New Testament names at least eight other apostles; besides the original twelve and Matthias whom we have already noticed; namely, Barnabas and Saul (Acts 12:2,3; 14:14) James, the Lord's brother, (Gal. 1:19) Silvanus and Timotheus, (1 Thess. 1:1, with 2:6) Apollos, (1 Cor. 4:6,9) and Andronicus and Junia. (Rom. 16:7) Though men who were apostles died and ceased to function in the church, the office of apostle did not die; the essential apostolic function still continued in the body of Christ.

The church of Christ which had apostles in the beginning can no more be a complete and properly functioning organism with all the apostles missing or dead, than a body can be a complete and properly functioning organism with some vital organ which it had at birth dead or missing. We do not outgrow the use of any organ. If an infant needs a stomach, so does an adult. If an infant church needs apostles, so does an adult church; and the same could be said for all the other officers who were set in the New Testament Church. The structure and organization of Christ's body must necessarily remain the same throughout all ages, if that body is to carry out the same functions and fulfill the same purposes.

It is one of the tasks of the church, as the body of Christ, to take men of a lower or earthly kingdom, and by means of the new birth, through the saving ordinances of the church to transmute that lower life to the life of Christ's kingdom.

We have already said in previous sermons on baptism and the new birth, that the human body will not tolerate foreign or extraneous substances, even when they are like itself. Up to this moment, medical science still finds it impossible to transplant any body organ into another body, because the body immediately sets about to destroy any such proteins introduced into it. We pointed out that the only way a plant could become a part of a human body was by surrendering itself completely, giving up its own life and its own identity, undergoing the processes of digestion and assimilation in the body, and then becoming miraculously endowed with the life of the body. Similarly, the only way a sinful, wicked, rebellious man may become a part of the body of Christ and partake of his life, is by surrender, by complete and total change through the ordinances of baptism and laying on of hands, followed by the endowment with the Holy Spirit, which is the life of Christ's body.

Once he has become a living part of the body of Christ it becomes the responsibility of each individual to make his peculiar and distinctive contribution to the functioning of the body. Because he is now reborn, endowed with new life, and under the direction of that new life which is the life of the body, he should act in complete harmony with every other part of the body. There will be no schism in the body. There will be unity in diversity, and diversity in unity. Different members will perform radically different functions, but all will be working for the benefit of the whole body, and under the direction of the Spirit of Christ which is the life of that body. No member of the body of Christ can say to another, "I have no need of thee." No function of the body of Christ can be neglected, no organ can be discarded, without destroying, or at least greatly handicapping the whole body. Each part depends on the efficient functioning of every other part for its growth, its daily sustenance, its own efficiency in the work which the body as a whole is trying to do.

The Spirit which permeates the body -- the Spirit of Christ -- gives life to the body. When your Spirit is in your body, you know that you live. When Christ's Spirit is in his body, and you are a part of that body, you know that Christ lives. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." One who does not know that Jesus is the Christ has not yet established a complete or satisfying functional relationship with the body of Christ, for that body will transmit the life of Christ, and a knowledge that that life is real, and that it exists within each member.

Because the church of Christ is his body, it is more than an organization. It is an organism. It must have life, or it is a dead body which can do none of the work which a body is supposed to do. If a group of men meet together and effect an organization which they call a church, it may be a good organization, but it cannot be an organism; it cannot be the body of Christ. Like produces like. Men can put into a church only the life which is within themselves -- which is no life at all except a fleeting mortality. The body of Christ is formed only as the life of Christ, the intelligence of Christ, the will of Christ moves to call out, select, and organize the constituent human elements needed to make a church, and then endows them with his life, and sets them in proper organizational relationship with each other, and commissions them to perform his work on earth.

Let us note briefly at this point that when food enters the body, it is not the food, but the directing life and intelligence or spirit of the body, which determines where the food shall be built into the body. When members enter the church, they do not choose to serve as apostles, or elders, or any other officer, except they be selected and commissioned by the Spirit of Christ, functioning through the organization of the body. "No man taketh this honor unto himself save he be called of God as was Aaron." Aaron was called by Moses, the prophet who was already a functioning part of the body, called and set aside for that purpose.

Latter Day Saints believe that the church of Christ lost its life, its power,

its authority during the dark ages of apostasy, and became a dead church. Many great and honorable men tried to restore it to life through reformation, but because life can proceed only from life, succeeded only in establishing great and beneficent organizations, which because of their lack of perfection in organization and their lack of that mysterious but vital life-giving Spirit, could not truly be called the church and body of Christ. Not until the living Christ himself moved to re-establish and re-organize his church with all the functional relationships needed to make his perfect body on earth, and then to plant within it the life-giving power of his authority and his priesthood, was his body -- his church to be found on earth. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was brought into being not by any act of man, but by act of God who appeared to the young prophet, Joseph Smith in vision, and pointing to his Son, Jesus Christ by his side, said, "This is my beloved Son; hear ye him."

We invite you to share in the life of this body of Christ which grew from that experience to become a living member of a living church which has today the same officers, the same organization, the same functions, the same gifts and powers, the same authority, the same saving ordinances, which were known in the New Testament Church, that by the life of his body you might be transmuted into his heavenly kingdom.