

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

MEMBERS OF HIS BODY

The statement that constitutes the subject of this study is found in **Ephesians 5:30**. At first glance the meaning of these words seems to be simple and transparent, but this is only because of certain ideas that the reader carries into them. Men come to this passage with the view that there is some kind of an organization, organism, society, or arrangement that is called "the body of Christ" which is made up of its members. Since no one quite understands what it is, it is usually called "the mystical body of Christ," a phrase that cannot be found in Scripture.

Teaching concerning "the mystical body of Christ" is one of the cornerstones of Roman Catholic doctrine which should have been abandoned at the time of the Reformation, but it has survived in various forms in Protestant theology.

I am regularly amused and surprised as I come upon the naive idea that many hold that the body of Christ is some gigantic being a mile or so tall composed of God's body even as the human body is made up of the millions of cells that constitute it. Someone sent me a somewhat clever drawing of this concept, which upon first glance at the face looked like Holman's drawing of Christ, but upon closer examination revealed thousands of human faces, legs, and arms intertwined to form a gigantic body. This picture was so disgusting and the concept so revolting that it found an immediate place in my wastebasket.

To the diligent student two questions arise immediately in considering Eph. 5:30: What is a member? and What does the word *body* mean in this context? The words which follow, "of His flesh and of His bones," are practically devoid of any textual authority and are lacking altogether in internal evidence. We relieve ourselves of an insuperable problem by accepting the evidence that the last seven words of this verse (nine in the Greek) are an interpolation, probably from Gen. 2:23. However, the major problem remains, and we need to face up to the question: "What are we being told when the Spirit of God tells us we are members of His body?" Can anyone speak authoritatively concerning this if he has not given careful consideration to the

meaning' of its two most important words? Most certainly not!

The Greek word for "member" is *melos*. It is translated "member" in each one of its thirty-four occurrences, and a study of all available material will reveal that its dominant meaning is a partaker or a participant of the benefits of the whole. It is generally supposed that one becomes a member of something by "joining up," and while this is true of many organizations, societies, and churches, one does not become a member, that is, a partaker or participant of the body of Christ by "joining up" with anything.

Peter, in his second epistle, declares that exceeding great and precious promises had been given to those to whom he writes, so that through these they might become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1 :4). Anyone who is a partaker of the divine nature is a partaker of the body (substance) of Christ.

That which Peter appears to hold out as only a positive expectation, Paul declares to be a reality and tells the believer in Christ that we are members (partakers) of His body. This does not mean that we belong to something called "the body of Christ," but that we are partakers of some aspect of what He is, the divine nature, His substance, His essence, called here "His body."

The basic meaning of the Greek word *soma* and the English word *body* is substance, more exactly organized substance. This meaning can be seen in Col. 2: 17 where *soma* (translated "body") is used in contrast with "shadow" and should be translated "**substance**" in order to set forth the antithesis. Whenever scripture speaks of "the body of Christ," and it becomes clear that it does not speak of His physical body (as it does in Matt. 27:58), then it is speaking of His substance or essence, all that which constitutes Him what He is.

For example, consider one aspect of His being, that He was God's Apostle (Heb. 3:1), a fact of real importance when we are considering Who He was, His being. This being true, if He takes of what He is and shares it by giving to others, they too will become Apostles, and will have partaken of His substance, even His body in whatever measure and character He sees fit to give.

In the Acts period, that thirty-three year era from the resurrection of Christ to Paul's great and significant announcement recorded in Acts 28:28 (see Issue No. **SB011**), those who believed in Jesus Christ partook of the divine nature in such manner that Paul could declare of them: "Now ye are Christ's substance, and partakers of a part" (1 Cor. 12:27). Not one had all the gifts or all of anyone gift. Then following this he says of them: "**Whom God also placed among the outcalled, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that powers, then graces of healing, helps,**

pilotage, varieties of languages. Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all have powers, not all have the graces of healing, not all speak languages, not all are interpreting. Covet earnestly the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent path" (1 Cor. 12:27-31). This has to be a path that would lead to more excellent things than any of the gifts mentioned.

In this same connection the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: "**There are diversities of gifts, yet it is the same Spirit; and there are gifts of service but it is the same Lord, and there are diversities of operations but it is the same God who is operating all these (*ta panta*) in everyone** (1 Cor. 12:4-6).

Following this statement Paul uses the human body as an illustration (1 Cor. 12:12). Then to show that the illustration is germane he points out that the believers in Corinth are also one body and tells them how this came about, declaring: "**For in one Spirit are we also all identified (merged) into one body, whether we be Jews or Greeks, whether we be slaves or free, even all are made to drink of one Spirit** (1 Cor. 12:13).

We must not stultify the truth here in order to make it fit some preconceived notion about the body of Christ being a company of people, and that we obtain membership in it by being baptized into it by the Holy Spirit. This is not what is declared here; furthermore, it is not so declared anywhere else in the New Testament. Many there are who come to the Word of God dragging along behind them the Roman Catholic doctrine of "the mystical body of Christ," which is supposed to be composed of all believers. Needing desperately to find some way to get believers into this mysterious thing, they latch onto this passage and declare that we are baptized into it by the Holy Spirit. However, the Greek does not say "**by one Spirit,**" but clearly states "**in one Spirit.**" Paul then elaborates on this in an illuminating manner. It is in one Spirit that all who possessed a gift were merged into one body, a single unit. This being in one Spirit made them a unit, so Paul exhorts them to act as a body, even as the human body acts. When he says: "**The body is not one member but many,**" he is speaking of the human body.

One truth that all students of the Word need to learn is that the word "body" (*soma*) is a very useful word that is used to express numerous ideas and concepts. Paul's First Corinthian epistle is proof of this, especially the twelfth chapter where this word is used to set forth four different things.

At this point I want to say that I have long felt that many of us took a wrong turn and made a major mistake when we took certain words out of Ephesians 1 :22, 23 ("**the church which is His body**") and used it as a designation for that company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ since the salvation-bringing message of God was

made freely available to the nations at Acts 28:28. While it is true that we are a unique company, having believed without seeing, without miracle, and without signs, we have no right or reason to designate ourselves as or claim to be "the church which is His body." Since God did not give us a name, we should not try to find one. We are believers, we are sinners who have been saved by the grace of God, and that is all we can claim to be until that day we stand in our lot in the kingdom of God.

The teaching of Ephesians 1 :22-23 is that God gave (constituted) Jesus Christ to be the Head (out flowing source) over all to the outpositioned ones who are His body (substance). This explains the character of those gifted men in the Acts period. Jesus Christ was flowing into them and out through them to others. There were many such as these in the Acts period. There are none of these today.

We very well know that when we qualified as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ that something divine came into our lives and became a part of us. We cannot put this into words and to try to do so would only be setting forth our personal feelings and experiences. But since the Word declares that God has given us a portion of His Spirit as the earnest of Our full portion, we can say that we have become in some small measure partakers of the divine nature. And we can also say that we are partakers of His substance. However, once this is said we should be able to show its effects on our lives.

The statement, "We are members of His body," appears in a rather long portion that deals with the relationship between husbands and wives. It has to be related to this subject in some manner, and if it is removed from its context to teach some idea about "our place in the body of Christ" as one expositor suggests, we will lose its message altogether. It is because I am a member of His body, that is, a partaker of His substance, that I should develop and show forth the most exalted truth that God has revealed concerning the marital relationship. This passage should not be used to teach "body truth," as so many are trying to make it do, for it is in a context that teaches marriage truth, a much-needed truth in the day in which we live.

End Issue No. SB147