



Ecclesiology: The Study of the Church

Lesson 2: The Body of Christ

INTRODUCTION

1. Imagine that you are moving to another city, and you don't know any Christians there. Your first order of business is to find a church. List five things that you would look for in a church.

Many of us tend to treat the church as we treat most other things in life: as consumers. We want to receive certain goods and services that fulfill our desires (which we sometimes call “needs”). And we want to obtain these goods and services at a good price.

Since we act as consumers in so many areas of life, it seems only natural to do the same in church. But as we'll see in the following study, Scripture teaches that our attitude toward church should be just the opposite.

2. What are some ways that Christianity challenges consumerism? _____

MAIN IDEA

Scripture teaches that Christians should not approach the church as consumers but as members of a body. This means that we are to commit to one another, depend on one another, honor one another, and care for one another. In all we do in the church, we should seek not the fulfillment of our own desires but the common good.

DIGGING IN

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul begins discussing spiritual gifts, which the Corinthians had been using in self-serving ways. In the opening verses of the chapter, Paul reminds them that all their different gifts are given by the same Spirit and for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:12–26

When Paul writes in verse 13 that we were all baptized into one body, he teaches that all of us are united to Christ and to one another. This profound unity we have with Christ, in other words, is also the foundation of our unity with one another.

While Paul's language in verses 12 and 13 refers most naturally to the universal church (that is, the total number of God's people throughout history), the rest of the passage clearly refers to concrete relationships in the local church. This makes perfect sense because, according to the whole New Testament, local church membership is how we “put on” and testify to our membership in the universal church.

For instance, think of how the New Testament describes the relationship between the righteous standing we have in Christ and our need to “put on” righteous actions. We *are* righteous in Christ, and we prove that by striving to live righteous lives (see especially Rom. 6:1–14; Col. 3:9–10).

Our church membership is similar. As Christians, we *are* members of Christ’s universal church, and we “put on” that membership through membership in a local church. Thus, one implication of this passage of Scripture is that all Christians should, by definition, be members of local churches.¹

1. What is the overarching metaphor Paul uses to describe the church throughout this passage? _____

2. What do the “foot” and the “ear” say in verses 15 and 16? What attitude or emotion does this express? _____

3. In verses 17 to 20, Paul essentially makes two points for the “foot” and the “ear.” What are they? _____

4. Read verses 19–20. If you are tempted to think like the “foot” and the “ear,” how do these verses encourage you? _____

5. What do the “eye” and the “head” say in verse 21? What attitude does this express? _____

6. What are the two main points in Paul’s response to the “eye” and the “head” (vv. 22–25)? _____

7. What does Paul say about the parts of the body that seem to be weaker (v. 22)? In light of this, how we should treat church members who do not seem impressive to us? _____

8. According to verse 25, God seems to have two goals for arranging the parts as he does. What are they? What is the example he gives in verse 26 to illustrate these things? _____

¹ Bobby Jamieson, *Built upon the Rock: The Church*, ed. Mark Dever, 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19–22.

9. In light of this passage, how is a “Lone-Ranger Christian,” who tries to live out his or her discipleship to Christ independently of others, misguided? _____

10. Back in verse 7, Paul articulates a priority that he returns to over and over. He writes, “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” In 14:12 he says, “Since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.” And again in 14:26 he says, “Let all things be done for building up.”

This is the exact opposite of a consumer mentality. Consumers seek to fulfill their desires. Christians on the other hand are called to build up others and to seek the common good.

What are some practical ways that we can reject consumerism and seek the common good in how we relate to:

a) The church’s corporate gatherings? _____

b) Listening to sermons? _____

c) Older members of the church? _____

d) Young mothers? _____

e) Widows? _____

f) Singles? _____

11. Go back to the list of things you made at the beginning of this study of what you would look for in a church. Is there anything you’d change? _____

