



## **Universal Organism Of The Body Of Christ**

The body of Christ can be organized, but its identity is not determined by any man-made organizational structure on earth by which the individual members are marshaled to function according to some corporate spreadsheet. On the contrary, the church is the organic body of Christ that is governed from heaven by Jesus alone as the only head. It is ordered on earth by the power of the gospel (Cl 1:18). The church, therefore, is a monarchy.

It is for this reason that the church is a collective of people who have individually responded to the gospel everywhere throughout the world. The individual members who have been added to the collective gospel-obedient body of disciples are immediately functioning parts of the worldwide body upon their response to the gospel. No job description on an outline of paper is needed to motivate life-changing behavior. They are simply caused by the gospel to behave according to the wishes of their King as explained in His instruction manual, the word of God (See 2 Co 4:15; 2 Tm 3:16). In other words, the behavior of the Head of the body on His incarnational gospel journey from heaven, crucifixion for our sins, and then on to the right hand of God in heaven, is the established gospel order for the function of the members of the body of Christ (See Ph 2:5-11)

### **A. The collective body:**

The church of Christ is a collective body of people who function as a worldwide organic body who function in response to the gospel. All the parts (members) are different in their function, but because each part is gospel driven, then unity prevails and each part plays its part in the organic function of the body worldwide.

Each member has been baptized into this organic body (1 Co 12:13), not into any one particular assembly of the body. There is simply no such thing in the New Testament as “membership” in a particular local autonomous group of members. If this were indeed the case, then the body would be inherently divided throughout the world. It would be divided on the basis of either unique traditions or opinions of the members. But the body of members function as one because of their united response to the one gospel.

**Members of the church are united because those who have obeyed the gospel have responded only to the gospel.**

## **B. Inherent unity of the gospel:**

One is a member of the church, not because he or she is fitted into a local institutional religious organization, but because each member works universally, and individually, under the common authority of one Head in heaven (See Ep 4:11-16). For this reason, there can be only one structure of authority for all the members of the worldwide organic body, and thus only one head. This is when we must remember that one hundred percent of all authority rests with King Jesus in heaven (Mt 28:18). There is no authority, not even one percent, that is left over for local self-appointed leaders of the church. This is what the Holy Spirit wanted us to understand when inspired Paul to write 1 Corinthians 12:12:

*“For as the body is one [universally] and has many members [universally], and all the members of the one [universal] body, though they are many, are one [universal] body, so also is Christ.”*

**The universality of the one body assumes that there is only one Head of the body who has all authority.**

Christ is the one head of the universal body. This means that the members of the body in any one location of the world **cannot organize King Jesus out of their function with the parts of the body.** The King has all authority that reaches from heaven to around the world (Mt 28:18; Cl 1:18). No rulers or lords are needed on earth for the organic function of the individual members of the body throughout the world. The head office in heaven has already been filled with only one head. No other heads on earth need apply. Therefore, if there are those on earth who would seek to be lords over the body on earth, then they are out of order (See 1 Pt 5:1-4). Such heads have presumptuously assumed that which they can never be in the organic function of the body.

During the end of Jesus' ministry, one earthly ruler asked Jesus, *“Are you a king?”* (Jn 18:37). Jesus responded, *“You say correctly that I am a king. For this reason I was born”* (Jn 18:37). The first identity mark of the body of Christ is that there is only one reigning King who has all authority, which includes all authority among those who are of His church of disciples. This King is the head of the one universal body (See Ep 1:20-23).

### **C. The heavenly authority:**

When we speak of rulers, heads, lords and kings in reference to the organic function of the body of Christ, we must understand that Jesus is the only Ruler, Head, Lord and King. **If**

**ever there were appointed rulers, heads, lords, and kings of the body on earth, then the local church would turn into an earthly religious organization.** It would morph into a religious institution that is controlled by people on earth. This would be so because the organic function of the body would be controlled by people on earth, not by King Jesus in heaven. And for this reason, the body would no longer function organically, but organizationally within one independent body of believers.

The organism would become an organization, and thus be defined as “organized religion.” This would be the very denial of the authority of King Jesus through the power of His gospel to function in the lives of the members of the body. In other words, if the members (parts) of the body function after the order of the man-made manipulation of self-appointed lords, then the members are not motivated by the gospel to contribute their God-given gifts to the function of the organic body. They are more often motivated to fulfill their positions, or work descriptions, on a corporate church spreadsheet.

Because Jesus foresaw that the preceding would be an ever-present danger among His disciples, He mandated the following:

*You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them. **But it will not be so among you** (Mk 10:42,43).*

**It is the gospel, not an organizational structure the members may create for themselves, that releases the power of the gospel in the function of each member.**

It is not without notice that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians concerning their dysfunctional behavior as the body, which dysfunction was revealed in their assemblies, he did not write

out a “church roster,” or marshal them into some organizational outline of responsibilities. On the contrary, he simply gave them a few instructions that related to their respect for one another in the assembly, and then let it go at that (See 1 Co 14:26-40). The gospel would take it from there, as he reminded them in his second letter (See 2 Co 4:15; 5:14).

We must keep in mind that it is not wrong to organize an assembly, or the members as a whole for work responsibilities. But we must be careful to understand that the church of members is not a corporate organization with lords over each department. Therefore, we must restrain ourselves from importing into the order of the disciples some organizational control system of the corporate world, thinking that such order will produce growth, both spiritually and numerically among the disciples. In fact, the more we would rely on a corporate order to inspire the function of the disciples in their ministries, the less the disciples often look to the example of the incarnate behavior of the Son of God.

**The church is not a corporation, but a cooperation of gospel-obedient disciples who seek to live after the incarnate example of their King.**

#### **D. Organic outreach of the body:**

The New Testament teaches that the members of the body function organically to reach out to those of the world, wherever there are lost people. If the members were confined only to themselves in order to function organically, then, as Paul said, they “*would have to go out of the world*” (1 Co 5:10). So if the members confine themselves to themselves, then there is little power released by the gospel through them in order to move them into the lives of unbelievers.

There can never be among the disciple anything as a “Christian

monk in a monastery.” In order for the members to function organically, they must associate with those to whom it is their mission to invite others into eternal glory. In this way, therefore, the members of the organic body always function individually in their relationship with their friends of the world. It is always “one-on-one” in an effort to bring one’s friends into Christ. Gospel-driven disciples can never remain silent concerning the gospel they have obeyed. It is for this reason that organizational structures must never minimize the power of the gospel to work in the lives of the members.

**Gospel-driven disciples do not need the crutch of an organizational structure in order to be inspired to work.**

The institutional (organized) church often “plants churches” that are clones of the organizational structure of the “mother church.” On the other hand, gospel-driven organic bodies of members simply spread as leaven throughout the world, influencing and teaching others about the incarnate Son of God (See Mt 13:33). The result of the organic gospel-driven function of the body is not to organize “planted churches.” On the contrary, the members of the gospel-driven body of believers functions organically for Jesus in the communities in which the members live. They simply spread like leaven into all their communities, and subsequently into all the world. It is not something that we organize the disciples to do, but the way we are. Gospel-obedient people cannot help but be gospel-driven proclaimers of the gospel.

**In order to stimulate the growth of the church in any region, the members of the church in that region must grow in their understanding of the gospel.**

The organic body of Christ was “planted” once over two thousand years ago on the day of Pentecost (At 2). That “planting” was the first and last planting. Since that planting on Pentecost, the organic body has simply permeated the world.

It has done so by one spiritual beggar telling another beggar where to find spiritual bread in order to live forever. Organic “church growth” is that simple.

**It is often the case that the more we take our minds off the power of the gospel, the more we turn to institutional organizational structures in order to grow the church.**

### **E. Organic fellowship of the body:**

Fellowship among members of the body does not necessitate agreement on all matters of opinion or ministries. The members of the body must associate with one another in assembly and ministry. However, this does not mean that they are to be a cloned cult group bound to agree on all matters of opinion. Also, the members of the body must be allowed to function individually with their God-given abilities in order that each member take ownership of his or her responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus.

**The association of the members of the organic body with those who are of different beliefs does not assume that the members of the body accept the beliefs of those with whom they differ.** It was Paul’s custom to function evangelistically by going into the synagogues and associating with the unbelieving Jews (At 17:2). But this did not mean that his association with unbelieving Jews in the synagogues somehow compromised his faith. He was simply functioning as an organic part of the body in order to preach the gospel. Aquila and Priscilla likewise associated with the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue in Ephesus, but they did not become unbelieving Jews because they showed up at the synagogue every sabbath (See At 18:24-28).

On another occasion, Paul wanted to enter a pagan temple of idolatrous worshipers (See At 19:29-34). But his desire to enter

the temple was not a compromise of his faith, neither would we assume that he was fellowshipping the erroneous beliefs and behavior of idolatrous worshipers. **Organic members go everywhere and anytime in order to engage anyone in order to give everyone an opportunity to have eternal life.** That is why they are organized as members of the body. This is taking ownership of our responsibility to live the incarnate example of our King in His journey from heaven into this world (Ph 2:5-11).

**As the Son of God did for us, we, the disciples of the Son, must have the mind of the incarnate Son in order to associate with unbelievers.**

## **F. Common obedience to the gospel:**

The fellowship of the members of the organic body is based on each individual member's obedience to the gospel through baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one [universal] body*" (1 Co 12:13). Members of the body, therefore, have a common organic function because of their "common faith" (Jd 3).

Their common obedience to the gospel has placed them on "Jesus' team." They obeyed the gospel individually, and thus, they organically function as individual members of the one universal body, regardless of where they live in the world. Being on some local team of organized religionists is not necessary in order to be on Jesus' team universally as a member of His organic body.

The members are in fellowship with one another because of their common obedience to the gospel. This is a universal fellowship that allows each member to function organically wherever he or she may live in the world. The members' common individual loyalty to the one Head, brings them



into an organism of members that functions as one church universally.

Wherever the baptized members sit on Sunday morning has nothing to do with their common connection to the Head as individual members of the universal body. However, their common assembly as gospel-obedient people reaffirms who they are in reference to their fellowship with one another in assembly.

**Where the members of the organic body of Christ sit on Sunday morning does not determine their membership with the body, nor their function as part of the universal body of Christ.**

Where the members are located any day of the week does not determine their organic connection with one another as individual members of the universal body. They function daily. Their regular assembly may encourage their organic function as individuals (See Hb 10:24,25). However, regardless of their assembly behavior with one another, or apart from one another in different locations, each member is responsible to function individually as an organic member of the one universal body. It is for this reason that those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus been added by God to His people throughout the world, should seek out those who have likewise obeyed the gospel in baptism.

**The members do not assemble in order to function organically. They assemble because they are functioning organically.** We must not forget that in the first century, on the first day of the existence of the body, the members of the body were organically functioning as individuals **before** there was an assembly of the members the following Sunday after the Pentecost of Acts 2 (At 2:41). When the 3,000 were baptized into Christ, and subsequently we are added by God to the fellowship of His people, they became the body of Christ, and

thus immediately began to function as the church of Christ.

**It is the gospel, not assemblies, that has the power to inspire members of the body to be active in preaching the gospel.**

## G. Organized under Christ alone:

The problem develops when an organized church establish authorities who become the standard by which individual members must be subjected before their organic function is validated as “faithful.” When groups of disciples become highly organized under a common authority on earth—this is “high church” in the minds of some—then they often become the judge and lawgiver of those who do not fit into their spreadsheet organization. In this way, institutional hierarchies hinder the universal organic function of the members of the body.

Organized religionists always consider those who seek to function organically to be a virus to any organizational church. And in truth, organic members are always a threat to organized religion because they seek to function independently from any of the hierarchal lords that constitute organized religion. They, as Jesus, will always be a threat to the religious establishment of the day that is maintained by lords.

The organized Jewish religious establishment of Jesus’ day could not cope with the early disciples because the disciples would not conform to the hierarchy of authority of the Jews’ organized religion. On one occasion, the Jewish establishment even “*commanded them [the disciples] not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus*” (Acts 4:18). This is the attitude of institutional leaders toward those who would seek to be independent from the constraints of institutional religions.

**Those who preach freedom from religious bondage are ways a threat to those who hold the keys to religious prisons (See GI 5:1).**

The behavior and attitude of institutional religious leaders has not changed since the days of the Jewish hierarchy of Jerusalem. The organic function of the body continues to be judged by those in “high places” who seek to be rulers and lords of organized churches. By behaving as such, lords as the Pharisees and scribes in the first century, sought to intimidate individual members of the body into compromising their freedom that they had in Christ to function organically wherever they have and with whomever they might encounter every day in their lives. Unless we become somewhat disturbed by the presence of such lords in the religious world today, we must remind ourselves that the same problem with lordship existed in the first century among some of the disciples (See At 20:28-30; 1 Pt 5:1-4).

Those who are truly free under the lordship of King Jesus truly understand the power of the gospel that delivers us from the bondage of religion. Therefore, the Holy Spirit mandated, “*do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

### **Group Review Discussion Questions**

[After reading the text of this bookito, answer the following questions in a discussion group with others.]

1. What does it mean when any part of the body can function to his or her full ability when set free from religious lords on earth?
2. What does it mean when we say that when one obeys the gospel, he or she is immediately a functioning member of the body?
3. What is an institutional church or religion?
4. Why is the organic function of the body not confined to the assemblies of the disciples?
5. Why is the terminology “plant churches” not a valid expression of the growth of the body of Christ since the first century?
6. Why would agreement on all matters of opinion hinder the organic function of the body?
7. What is the foundation upon which the organic body is unified?
8. Why must the organic function of the members of the body never

be confined to an assembly of the body?

9. Why do organically functioning members threaten institutionally minded leaders?
10. Why does the gospel set us free from the bondage of religion?

## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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