

I arrived at the conclusion that God exists in a college class in Human Anatomy and Physiology, learning how the muscles work at the individual fiber levels. That epiphany in a curious location (proving also that there is just no way to keep God out of schools or anywhere *else* He wants to be) was the first of what I now call my *Wow* – *God’s a lot smarter than we give Him credit for moments: Okay, forget this “accident” stuff – there’s just no way.*

Now, my “day job” is that of a high school science teacher, with a class in Human Anatomy (I started out wanting to be a physician, but let’s just say God had other plans). Another of my *Wow* moments occurred just recently, as the Spirit tied my knowledge of Anatomy together with the history of the Church and readings from the Apostle Paul’s letters to the Corinthians and Ephesians. In the process, I have learned there are parallels between the development of a human body and the development of the Church in all its denominations, and that it is time to look at the entire subject of unity in the Body of Christ in a new light.

Here’s the essential points:

From one fertilized cell (sperm and egg fused together) come distinct “germ layers” which form the basis for one whole body, with all of its various specialties and systems; nervous, digestive, cardiac, etc.

From one Savior comes His Church (also known as the Body of Christ) in all of its various denominations (specialties, or forms of emphasis).

Now is the time for the Body to grow into, recognize its uniqueness to, and desire to be fully united with its Head – Christ Himself.

Look like a really *big* stretch? Stick with me, and let me explain. First, the scriptural arguments:

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many...But, in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them,*

*just as He wanted them to be. If they were one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.*

1 Cor. 12: 14 – 20 (NIV)

*Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you has a part in it.*

1 Cor. 12: 27 (NIV)

*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.*

Ephesians 4: 11 – 15 (NIV)

Second, to bring the unfamiliar up to speed, bear with me for a crash lesson in basic embryology. When sperm and egg get together, one sperm fertilizing one egg, all the genetic material from both cells is combined to form one cell with the proper number of chromosomes; in humans, this is 46. The first thing the new cell starts to do is *divide*; first into two, then four, then eight, and so on. The divisions take place so quickly that while the new life grows in the sense that its *number* of cells increase, it doesn't grow in *size* very much.

Eventually, of course, this changes and the number of cells increases to the point where three distinct germ layers begin to form. These are known as *ectoderm*, *mesoderm* and *endoderm*. From these three layers come stem cells that produce specialized tissue and, ultimately, each and every system in the body. Some systems come from only one layer, such as the nervous system

from the ectoderm; others are a joint effort of layers, such as the digestive system, in which all three contribute. Eventually, however, all grow into an adult human.

The church started with One, of course, its Builder. The One selected twelve, then the twelve grew to about 120 by the Day of Pentecost. From there, growth exploded – from 120 to at least 3,000 with one sermon from Peter, under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then growth expanded to 5,000, then to increased *numbers* receiving salvation daily. Yet, the *size*, or the area, did not change much; the Church remained confined to Jerusalem, until the Church’s enemies tried to destroy it through persecution. Instead, the Church was scattered, the first in several waves of growth throughout the known world, eventually reaching Rome itself.

As the Church itself grew, it adopted earthly leaders and an organizational structure; unfortunately, over time these earthly leaders traded the leadership of the Holy Spirit for following their own traditions and interpretations of the Scriptures. This was fine as long as the leader was surrendered to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Christ. Without such spiritual leadership, however, abuse of power and misuse of God’s resources must eventually follow. God’s people notice such things, and the natural desire for reform led to the creation of other denominations and sects.

While some of these groups emerged from less-than-spiritual considerations, most were formed out of specific grievances with the Church as it existed then. Each of these denominations, thus, emphasized different aspects of the faith and often grew from the teachings of specific individuals. Men such as John Wyclif, John Huss, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, William Tyndale and others became the germ layers (“stem cells,” if you will) of these new denominations. Often, separation from the “mother denomination,” whichever it happened to be, was not the original intent of these men, but was the end result as that denomination became firmly

entrenched and resistant to change, even if it was for the better. And so, the splits came – much the same way as cells in the developing baby begin to specialize and form the foundation of the different systems of the body.

For example, the early Lutheran Church was based on the concept of Justification – *Sola Gratia* (grace alone) through *Sola Fide* (faith alone) for *Sola Christus* (Christ's merit alone). The first Anglicans tended to stress the authority of the Scriptures; anything that could not be backed up by the Bible was to be rejected. John Calvin and John Knox (whose teachings would form the basis for the Presbyterian Church) emphasized predestination, while Methodists (led by John and Charles Wesley) stressed the Grace of God. The Puritans became the basis for the Evangelical denominations; Baptists claim them as their spiritual founders, stressing the believer's separation from the world and allegiance to the Kingdom of Heaven. Pentecostals build on the evangelical tradition but emphasize the work and the supernatural Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the Church. It could be argued that the latest of these groups to emerge is the Messianic branch of Judaism, keeping Jewish identity and practices, but acknowledging *Jeshua* (Jesus) as the promised Messiah of the Jewish people and re-emphasizing the Jewish roots of the faith.

Some believers see such denominations and movements and are appalled that the Church should be in such a state. They point to unbelievers who cite as one of their arguments against placing their faith in Jesus the idea that believers cannot agree among themselves. Such people bring up the wars that have been fought and the blood spilled over differences in doctrine as evidence against Jesus being the Way, the Truth and the Life – conveniently ignoring such *un-Christlike* factors as greed and pride as possible sources of such conflicts. Among these believers, the desire for *reunification* is frequently heard. And every so often, you'll see great negotiations take place in order for two groups – Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox, for example – to be able to take the sacraments together, as if two great nations long at war with each other were trying to make a peace treaty between them. Such

efforts are doomed to limited success at best (and to complete failure at worst) because we still look upon denominationalism as a kind of failure of the Church. In addition, in many cases we still look on those outside of our denomination as *them*, those dumbbells, the folks who don't know what the faith is *really* all about, souls just as lost and on their way to hell as if they had never heard the Gospel at all.

And among those who are not actively seeking reunification (who think their denomination is fine within itself, thank you very much, and the whole problem could be solved if you just join *us*) there is still the problem of pride. Salvation is thought to be found within the denomination and its practices, rather than in Christ. Even among independent churches, there is the tendency to raise "freedom in Christ" to the level of Christ Himself. We're the "King's kids," after all, and we will be joint heirs with Jesus. And while it is true we have the privilege of His authority, some take this to mean that we get to play with God's "stuff," as it were, manipulating God in order to satisfy material cravings.

As long as these groups or denominations try *themselves* to be the head of the body, reunification will not succeed. Every part of the human body must be under the control of the nervous system – the *head*, specifically the brain – to be of any use to the person; in fact, a part to which nerve connections have been broken, even though it gets blood supply and all the nutrients it needs, is of no use at all and regarded as "dead" by the person and his or her physician. So every believer or group of believers that is not under the lordship of the *Head*, which is Christ, is at best not useful to Christ and at worst a drain on other Body parts.

Each believer has a role in the life of the Church, a job to do, but must surrender their lives to Jesus to be of any use for the Kingdom at all. It is only through Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit, that the diverse portions of His Church can be brought together and made to function properly. In fact, using a different analogy, Jesus takes it one step further:

*I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and  
I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me, you can do  
nothing.*

(John 15:5, NIV)

In Romans 14, the Apostle Paul advises the church to stop passing judgment on each other, or on “disputable matters.” I submit that as long as a denomination follows the basic, unadulterated doctrine of the faith – that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised, virgin-born, sinless Son of Almighty God, who died to pay the penalty for our sins, was buried and who rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into Heaven and will one day return – and is not teaching or practicing that which is clearly contrary to Scripture, then every other quirk or trait or policy of that denomination that might turn off someone else falls under the “disputable matters” category.

My wife and I were in a church once, recommended by some friends of ours, which had the practice of taking up the collection not in the traditional baskets, but in a recreation of the Ark of the Covenant, carried along by the ushers. Obviously, I know it’s not *the* Ark, but only a representation of it; still, recalling the detailed instructions God left for Moses and Aaron about the genuine article and how it was to be handled – instructions that, not properly followed, tended to cost people their *lives* – I still felt uncomfortable, that this was immature and possibly disrespectful. However, we sat through the rest of the service, listened to what the pastor had to say (which was a pretty good sermon, as it turned out) and met the people in the church, who were some of the nicest folk you’d ever want to meet. We did not stand up and condemn the whole lot... we just did not go back.

If we begin to “judge another man’s servant” (Romans 14:4), it is the same as a person suffering from an autoimmune disorder, such as rheumatoid arthritis, where the body’s immune system attacks its own tissues instead of foreign invaders. That person is no longer considered healthy. In the same way, if I ripped into the aforementioned church for its practice, then I am

condemning myself by what I approve, to paraphrase Romans 14:22. Honest debate on doctrine is healthy for the church; the early church itself engaged in such questioning in Acts 15, when the Council at Jerusalem took up the issue of *What are we going to do about all these Gentiles coming into the church?* But notice that the Council did not excommunicate or demonize those who lost the argument, the Jewish believers who insisted the Law of Moses had to be strictly obeyed before one could even qualify for salvation. Such extreme action – similar to surgical removal of infected or cancerous tissue – is best left to God through the leading of the Holy Spirit, since only He can do so without damaging healthy tissue.

To carry the autoimmune disorder analogy a step further, we must also bear in mind that, in some cases, while the body's immune system is engaged in destroying its own tissues, secondary or "opportunistic" infections can creep in to do even greater harm. Revival has broken out in many places around the globe – Africa, Asia and even among Muslims in the Middle East, as witnessed to by Joel C. Rosenberg in Chapter 14 of his book *Epicenter*. Reading about this makes someone like me, who prays for revival to sweep the United States, practically ache with the question, *Why isn't that happening here?* There are, of course, many factors as to why revival occurs in one place and not another, but I believe that one reason that we do not see the great sweeps here is that the denominations are so busy fighting and sniping at each other that we have forgotten that Jesus is, ultimately (if I may be forgiven an old slang phrase), the "brains of the outfit." We have either dismissed or forgotten the spiritual side of our warfare and are more focused on the temporal aspects of the Body – we'd rather be proved "right" than be His, or simply soak up His blessings without using them in the Kingdom's work of winning others to Christ. And as we soak and fight among ourselves to see who's "right," cults and other religions snatch away the members of what *should* be the Body of Christ; hijacking the "cells," as it were, for their own use.

Instead of looking at the existence of denominations as a failure of the church, believers need to see themselves as truly a part of the Body of Christ – the whole being greater than its parts. Instead of people trying to initiate human-based “movements” for unity in the Body of Christ (however well-intentioned), believers must submit themselves fully to the Lordship of Jesus. It doesn’t necessarily mean you have to leave the local church where you are at (unless God directs you to one where He wants you to be); in fact, you may be the agent God uses to bring about change for His Glory in that local congregation. But it does mean you have reached the place where you can no longer sit back and keep soaking all of God into you, now you are ready to give away what God has put into you.

This is not some “nirvana” –like state where your own individuality is submerged and dissolved away, but *submission* to the living, eternal, dynamic God, Creator and King of the Universe, putting to full use everything He made you to be because you are giving Him the freedom to do it. The big difference between the church and the human body is that while cells have no consciousness, but simply make whatever they are genetically programmed to make, God values the individual, because every person – regardless of age, gender, skin color, ethnic background, educational or income level – has a job to do in His Kingdom, one that is especially suited for that person.

The health of the nation is tied in a very real way to the health of the church. A church is at its healthiest when it recognizes its part in the Church Universal. It is time for a focus shift, especially here in the United States, away from factions and “stuff,” but on Jesus and the job He gave us to do. This shift in thinking, this *repentance* from old mind-sets that keep believers in bondage of self, is the first step in national revival.