

How the Body of Believers Becomes Sick

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | September 21, 2023



We experience overall physical health when the various parts of our body are each healthy and are working together in harmony. Our health and ability to function are diminished if any part of our body is damaged or otherwise unhealthy.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul uses the metaphor of a human body for the church:

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 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 all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are

many parts, but one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (12:12-27 NIV84).

The head of the church is Jesus (Ephesians 4:15; 5:23), so the most serious assault on the body of believers would be to sever our (the body) connection to Jesus (the head). Just as in the beheading of a physical body, if the body of believers become detached from Jesus, it will die.

In this blog, I won’t go into the multiple ways through which Satan works to undermine our living faith connection to Jesus and install himself (masquerading as Christ) as the head of the church—but he has done this throughout history—see our blog [The Blindfolds and Veils Satan Uses to Blind the World](#). Instead, I want to focus on how Satan tricks the body of Christ into attacking itself, into a spiritual autoimmune disease in which various members work against each other.

Spiritual Autoimmunity

Our physical bodies can experience an injury or wound to a specific member—a broken arm, a cut finger, a sprained ankle. The injury/wound’s impact on the overall functioning of the body largely depends on its location and severity, but the rest of the body will attempt to rally to compensate, protect, and heal the wounded member, seeking to restore health and full function.

Likewise, if any individual member of the body of Christ is unhealthy—physically, emotionally, or spiritually—then their ability to fulfill God’s calling is diminished and the body of believers suffers and is less efficient in carrying out the Lord’s purposes. In a highly functional Christian community, the healthier members will rally appropriate supports and interventions to help compensate for, protect, and restore the struggling member to the highest level of health and functioning possible.

It would be destructive to our physical bodies if, with every injury we experienced, we simply cut off that body part. Likewise, it is injurious to the body of Christ to cut out from our fellowship every member who becomes spiritually wounded or sick. We amputate physical body parts only when they are beyond healing; we sever our fellowship with other people only when they have passed the point of being restored to godly fellowship.

Sadly, there will be times when an individual member’s heart becomes gangrenous with selfishness and they are bent in inciting division, conflict, and undermining Christian love and unity, resisting all efforts to restore them to healthy love and trust. In those rare instances, amputation is required—a tragic severing of the connection from the body is necessary (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

Sometimes our physical bodies, rather than having an injury to a single part, can suffer systemic

illness—a body-wide sickness that negatively impacts all the various parts.

In much the same way, the body of believers can become sick as a group with a systemic spiritual ailment. For instance, a congregation of good-hearted believers can fall into a group hysteria in which they all become terrified of some perceived external threat, often one they cannot themselves see or identify, but the threat causes everyone to become afraid. The fear itself then becomes a contagion that causes the church members to see fellow members as threats, and this causes them to isolate from one another rather than fellowship—to stop visiting the sick, stop evangelism, and even close the doors to their facility and cancel worship services. Such a body is no longer functioning as Jesus designed.

And worse yet, sometimes our physical bodies can suffer with an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks itself. When this happens spiritually to the body of Christ, church groups will devolve into factions who bicker among themselves, in which members become “orthodoxy and behavior police” of other members, gossips, and even bring accusations and slander against their own members.

Applying the Cure

The treatment for autoimmune disease of the physical body is some form of anti-inflammatory intervention that calms down the immune system and gets the body to stop seeing its own members as enemies to be attacked and destroyed.

Likewise, the only cure for a body of believers that has turned on itself is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who will bring the needed truth and love to bear in each individual heart so that members stop seeing other members as enemies and, instead, start working to heal and restore each other to health. This can only be done when Christ lives in the heart.

We can protect the body of believers from becoming sick in the first place by embracing and living out God’s wisdom for ourselves and our organization. God’s wisdom is lived out when we recognize that we are all different, just like the parts of the body are different. We have different talents, different gifts from God, and different life experiences, interests, personalities, abilities, education, and qualifications. This means we are not all equally fit to fulfill every position in a thriving church community. Some of us, even with the purest of heart, would drive out people from our meetings if we were to perform special music. Others would cause confusion if they were to teach. The body functions best when all individual members fulfill the function for which God has prepared them and for which they are called.

When we are converted to Jesus Christ and humbly submit ourselves to His service, we surrender our ego, our pride, our demands, and, instead of seeking to advance ourselves, we joyfully accept the role, job, position, calling that God knows we are best equipped to fulfill. In that place, fulfilling God’s calling for our life, we experience our greatest success, joy, and contentment; it is in carrying out God’s will for our lives that we thrive and find our true happiness. And when we see each member as being part of the same team, rather than as competitors, we rejoice when those who are gifted by God fulfill the duties for which they are best suited—because we know the team (body) is more likely to succeed at being a light to the world.

When the body of believers functions like this, every person values every other person and recognizes every individual as part of the family of God. We don’t become envious but rejoice in the successes of others, and we celebrate the fact that we are fulfilling God’s calling for our lives.

Satan tries to trick us by getting us to compare ourselves with others and, thereby, introduce division.

Jesus had to remind the apostle Peter of this very truth. On the beach, after Peter was reconciled to Jesus, and Jesus tells him of his future sacrifice, Peter asks about John:

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" (John 21:20-23 NIV84).

Jesus was saying, "What difference does it make to you what I have called John to accomplish for me? The question for you is: Will *you* be faithful; will *you* be loyal; will *you* do your duty for my kingdom?"

This message was not just for Peter; it is also for you and me today. We each have a calling, a duty, a purpose in God's kingdom. All the converted are part of the body of Christ, and our responsibility is to remain engaged in what God has called us to do in His cause—not to be distracted with what He has called others to do!

One of Satan's traps is to get people to compare themselves to others and become dissatisfied with their own station, to become jealous, envious, discontented. This is the philosophy of the world, what the Bible calls foolishness. It stirs up division, conflict, hatred, backstabbing, gossiping, and evil surmising.

We become sick as a body of believers when we replace trust in God with self-promotion, when we exchange the methods of God for the methods of this world, when we replace the design laws of God with the imposed rules of this world, when we exchange the principles of God for the principles of this world, when we replace objective reality with declarations, claims, and assertions.

If we want to be healthy as a body of believers, we must return to worshiping God as the Creator and living out His methods and principles in governance of ourselves. That means we must reject the philosophies of this sin-sick, self-centered world and live out the design-law truth as it is in Jesus. Each individual, if we want to thrive and experience the greatest fulfillment in this life, must surrender self to Jesus and seek His calling and purpose in our lives. We must fix our eyes on Him and not compare ourselves to others. We must carry out the duties God has given us to do to the best of our abilities and trust Him with how things turn out.

I encourage you to reject the self-exaltation, divisive methods of this world and to fix your eyes on Jesus, committing yourself to fulfilling to the fullest God's calling for your life.