

Series: Understanding the Body of Christ
Tonight's Lesson: When Did the Body of Christ Begin?

Introduction:

1. Today, God is taking believers in Christ and placing them into spiritual union with Jesus Christ and forming what the Bible calls *"the church, which is his body."*
Ephesians 1:22-23
2. Today, God is accomplishing His work on the earth through the church, the body of Christ. **Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8**
3. As members of the body of Christ, believers must be rooted and grounded in an understanding of what the Bible teaches about the body of Christ. If not, we will never understand the purpose and plan of God for this dispensation of grace.
4. In tonight's lesson, we will examine of the subject of when the body of Christ began. There is so much debate over this issue.
 - Some say it began in the gospels (Matthew-John).
 - Some say it began in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost.
 - Some would say it began in Acts 9 when Paul was saved.
 - Some would say it began in Acts 13 when Paul first preached the gospel of Christ and left Israel to go to the Gentiles.
 - Some would say it began after Acts 28 when Paul turned from Israel with finality and went to the Gentiles.
5. We will examine two important truths, and hopefully bring some clarity to this important issue.

First, the body of Christ could not begin until the finished work of Christ was accomplished.

1. How does a person get into the body of Christ?
 - The moment a person places his faith and trust in Christ's finished work, the Holy Spirit enters into him and baptizes him into Christ. **Ephesians 1:12-13, 2:8-10**
 - The believer is placed into a spiritual, living union with Jesus Christ. Members of the body of Christ are identified in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. **Romans 6:3-4**
 - We now possess the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. **Romans 6:11, 8:11**
2. Here is the point: There is no way that a person could be baptized by God's Spirit into the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ until it first occurred.
3. The body of Christ was not present in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Christ was dealing with the nation of Israel. There was a wall of partition between the Jews and Gentiles that had been erected through the law of Moses and the rite of circumcision.
4. In the body of Christ, we learn that there is no Jew or Gentile. We are all one in Christ. The middle wall of partition has come down. **Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:14**
5. How did God accomplish the breaking down of that wall and the bringing together of Jews and Gentiles into one body? According to **Ephesians 2:16**, Christ accomplished this *"by the cross."*

6. Christ kept the law in totality, but then bore its curse (death) for you and me. He took it out of the way, thereby removing the middle wall between Jews (who had the law but broke it) and Gentiles (who did not have the law). **Ephesians 2:15; Colossians 2:14**
7. The Bible is clear: The church, the body of Christ, could not possibly begin until Christ's finished work.
 - The cross removed the enmity of the law that would have cursed us with eternal death.
 - The resurrection provides a living union with Christ for all those who believe on Him.

Second, the body of Christ was not revealed until the apostle Paul.

1. The idea of "the body of Christ," composed of saved Jews and Gentiles, is the exclusive domain of the apostle Paul.
 - For example, there is not even a reference to the church, the body of Christ, in the Hebrew epistles (Hebrews-Jude).
 - The twelve did not even attempt to evangelize Gentiles. They confined their ministry exclusively to Israel, with the one exception of Peter's visit to Cornelius in Acts 10.
2. We live in the dispensation of grace. God is offering grace to Jews and Gentiles on an equal basis and placing believers into a living union with Jesus Christ, forming a new organism called the body of Christ.
3. This truth was revealed to Paul after his salvation in Acts 9. **Colossians 1:24-28; Ephesians 3:1-9**
4. Notice how many times, just in the book of Colossians, Paul refers to the church, the body of Christ. 1:18, 1:24, 2:17, 2:19, 3:15
5. Did the Holy Spirit baptize believers into the body of Jesus Christ before Paul showed up? It is possible that God did this without revealing it to anybody. **Romans 16:7; Galatians 1:22**
6. But there are two truths that we must accept and understand:
 - The body of Christ could not begin until after the finished work of Christ.
 - The body of Christ was not **revealed** until the apostle Paul.
7. If the church, the body of Christ, was Paul's doctrinal domain, where would we look to find sound doctrine that fits for us today? Paul's epistles (Romans through Philemon) constitute sound doctrine for the body of Christ today.