

ONE BODY by Bola Olu-Jordan

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1Cor.12:12)

INTRODUCTION

Several people believe they are Christians for various reasons. To some, because they are Members and belong to a Christian denomination, ministry or organization and attend regular services. To others, because they are active Workers; Sunday school teacher, chorister or member of a group in the church, believe and adhere to their church's doctrines, rules, etc. To many others, because they are Leaders and are gifted in one way or the other to Preach or mount the pulpit in the church.

While there are many other reasons why people believe they are Christians than these three groups highlighted above (i.e. members, workers and leaders), but this message wants to address these three classes of people who form a broad spectrum and category that majority fall into.

Before you continue reading this article, I recommend that you pause for a moment and locate where you belong in these three categories of people. Do it now and please, note that there is no wrong or right answer, only for the purpose of identification.

If you have done that, which I believe you did, you will find in the following message one or two points that discusses extensively on the category you fall into. This message is to identify your exact location within the body of Christ.

MEMBERSHIP

The very first step in being called a faithful, adherent or follower of any religious sect, organization or denomination is to become a member, same with Christianity, with the only difference that the membership is of the body of Christ, which is invisible, where Christ Himself is the head. "...God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1Cor.12:18,27). Many however, join and become members, workers and leaders of religious bodies, thinking it is the body of Christ. Only when these members of the body of Christ meet locally is there a true Church, otherwise any other meeting is just a religious meeting, not the Church of Christ.

It is not strange to hear some people not being a member of any local assembly of believers because of many 'disappointments' and 'imperfections' they have encountered or observed over the years everywhere they went. But that is not an excuse to quit from being a member of a local assembly, which is the expression of the true church. Jesus is coming for the true church, not a perfect individual or religious body (Eph.5:27). He is coming for a body, His body, comprising of many members across the world, united only by the Holy Spirit, not doctrines, creed or denominational laws. Only members of that body are members of the body of Christ.

While it is difficult for many to reconcile the difference between the membership of the body of Christ and that of a religious group, it is important for us to biblically consider how membership of these groups is contracted. I will start by asking you to sincerely answer this question: How

did you become a member, worker or leader of or in your present *church*? Again, I will want you to take a moment of deep thought back before you answer this question. You may consider these: were you invited by a member? Did you attend a special program and you decided to join? Do you have a special liking for the church's various activities? Is it your family Church? Does the church reflect your views and opinions on the Bible or any other beliefs? Did you read their tracts, bulletins, media programs, flyers, or because it is close to your home? Do you just love the leaders? Which one(s)? Don't continue reading unless you have picked one and if the reason is not listed here, just make sure you know it in your heart. Again, there is no right or wrong answer.

Whatever your reasons, let us go to the Bible to see how people become members of a local assembly. "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Act 2:41-42). This is the first membership that was ever recorded in the Bible. The reason why these members were added to the body was because they 'gladly received his word' and we know what the word was, the testimony of Jesus Christ in the mouth of Peter declared through the power of Pentecost.

Earlier on, these same people heard the disciples spoke in various tongues (languages) they never learned as they gathered in the Upper Room awaiting Pentecost (Luke 24:49). They were baffled because they knew that the disciples were non-natives and there was no way they could speak the language, yet many heard them speaking in their own various languages. They concluded that they were drunk. "And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is *but* the third hour of the day" (Act 2:12-15).

Peter explained to them what was happening and later testified of Jesus. They were all familiar with Jesus because He had just been crucified and they all believed He was a just and righteous man. "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Act 2:22). But Peter raised the standard to say Jesus was not just a good and righteous man, He is The Messiah and without Him, they were heading to hell. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Act 2:36).

We need to realize how bold and suicidal this declaration of Peter was in the public, knowing that he was not only alleging the Roman Government and the Religious leaders in Jerusalem of conspiracy, murder and wrong judgment of an 'innocent' man, but claiming that this *dead* Jesus is the Christ, a personality Israel revere with their lives (and still do but still don't believe it is Jesus) and that as a matter of fact, He is still alive! Jesus was crucified because He claimed to be the Christ, this to them was a blasphemy and here again was Peter, affirming the same despite the tense atmosphere.

LIKE MASTER, LIKE SERVANT

There's a common thread in Jesus' and Peter's messages: unpopular and had no attraction; they were at best very suicidal, unaccommodating, unfriendly, but the truth. Historically and prophetically, truth has the *misfortune* of being always bitter, and thus, rejected by the populace, only few, very few embrace it, mostly, the simple (Mat.11:26; 21:16).

Remember, several times people actually tried to stone Jesus for His messages (John 5:18; 8:59; 10:31-33; 11:8). At a particular time when thousands gathered to listen to Him, instead of preaching a juicy message that would create instant membership-base of five thousands men, (not counting women and children), He preached a message that left everyone angry, disappointed and annoyed so much that they all stormed out of the *crusade* ground. The most astounding thing was that, even His disciples left: they said, "this is a hard saying, who can hear it" (John 6:60). Thousands of potential membership reduced to unsatisfied twelve, who themselves could have left if there was a 'word of life' somewhere else! This was the type of message Peter preached; like Master, like servant (Mat.10:25; Luke 6:40)! If we are truly Jesus' servants, our messages would be like His, not sugar-coated.

You will agree that many preachers today don't preach this type of message because they are not servants of Jesus but religious title holders. If they do, they will become unpopular, lose relevance and membership and that is the barometer for measuring their success in ministry. What they preach is information about Christ not formation in Christ. This gives us a clue to the type of membership in many churches. A *wise* preacher cannot afford to injure the hearts of these pampered members with such raw messages, who, many times, constitute the means of their livelihood. So, they maintain them with words Paul called "excellency of speech or wisdom" and "enticing words of man's wisdom" (1Cor.2:1,4; Col.2:4). He warned the Church of Rome that they that preach such "serve not our Lord Jesus, but their own belly and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom. 16:18). Peter called their message "cunningly devised fables" and "great swelling words of vanity" (2Pet.1:16; 2Pet.2:18). But they have to keep preaching such in order to keep their relevance in ministry.

Many actually started such venture by obtaining bank loans and committing large financial resources and investments which must be recouped! The hired instrumentalists and professional praise and worship singers who perform every Sunday to attract people through music must be paid. So also many staffs of the church, whose lives and livelihood depend on the income of the church, too. Funds for properties, cars, school building projects, and many other projects that have no relevance to Christ, but necessary for ego boosting must be raised and lastly, the founder must live according to standard! A preacher who preaches the type of message of Jesus or the disciples today would soon have himself to blame in this circumstance.

Peter's motive was not to canvass for membership, because he had the understanding of how membership comes to the Church of God. He fully declared the unalloyed Gospel, not minding putting his life in jeopardy. But at this very instance, rather for Peter to be stoned, for daring to make such bold declaration in the public in the noses of the priests, high priests and the Jews, who killed his Master, God used it to establish the first membership of the Church. "Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Act 2:37-38).

OWNERSHIP QUESTION

The reason why many cannot preach sounds words is the fear of losing the people. But if we understand that they are never ours, there is no fear of losing what never belonged to us. Moses met with frustrations when he tried to save Israel, thinking they were his people (Ex.2:13). Paul too wished he was accused for his people, until God made him know that they were His people (Rom.9:3). They are never our members, they are God's and He knows how to bring them in, if we do what He asked us to do.

One of the characteristic of religious body is that it is founded, owned and controlled by man. Their voice is the voice of Herod and the sheep can't hear the voice of Jesus through them, but the voice of philosophy, motivation and quotable quotes of men derived through logic and convincing reasoning with all authority. The true shepherd goes ahead of his sheep and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers (John 10:4-5).

People no longer respond to the Gospel of the kingdom of God and its righteousness, but the gospel of other things like prosperity, breakthrough, etc because there are strangers on the altar and the sheep don't recognize their voice. When Peter spoke the word of life to these people, they became sober. There is no soberness in the church again but rendezvous; celebration and festivities galore. Nothing wrong with this if the basics have been settled. The sufferings of Christ and the sacrifices of the disciples have been watered down. The reality of hell is down played and the contaminating power of sin is ignored. The care of the shepherd is substituted with the tearing of the wolves in sheep's clothing!

As many as God had prepared for that day became repentant and believed, not excited and hailing the preacher for telling them what they want to hear as the case is today. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls" (Act 2:41). They received the words of repentance and baptism and they were added to the Church! This is the type of membership that is approved of God. It is God that adds to the Church those who repent and are baptized, not those who respond to adverts and special activities or programs.

Worthy of note is the fact that when these were added to the church, they didn't just become members, sitting down and observing what the owners of the church were doing but "continued stedfastly in the Apostles' Doctrine and Fellowship, and in Breaking of Bread, and in Prayers" (Act 2:42). This togetherness must be present in the body of Christ to truly express the Church. It is not about coming for services to fulfill religious sense. Paul clarified it: "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building (1Cor. 3:9). In the gathering of believers, everyone labours together with God, otherwise the word fellowship comes under a serious challenge.

That chapter closed by giving us idea about what the local assembly look like then: "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Act 2:46-47).

SYSTEMS AND STRATEGIES

Membership and church growth must not be through strategy or psychology of the people: knowing what the people want and providing it as an attraction. As many as desire music, friendship, fashion, association, fables, miracles, breakthroughs, etc, they know exactly where to go different from where those who need prayer, healing, spouse, children or even holiness would go. Church is not built on doctrines or gifts but on Christ. Jesus clearly said to Peter: "... thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mat.16:18). And what is the rock? The revelation of who Christ is, "thou art the Christ, the son of the living God" (Mat.16:16).

The only strategy God uses to add to His church is not the strategy of attraction; it is "such as would be saved". Special programs, super services, powerful prayer meetings to kill witches, financial seminars, breakthrough services, invitation of powerful men of God or other strange rituals in the name of faith or prophetic service may not be necessary, neither should sweet and compelling words or other scientific or philosophical methods which is bound to bring compromise and turn preachers to people pleasers. Success in ministry is not measured by crowd, but the presence and free working of the Holy Spirit in the gathering. It is not by order of service, but by the directive of the Holy Spirit.

God should be given the privilege of doing His own work His own way, if it is truly His own work, not our personal business. His anointing should neither be merchandized nor His calling mortgaged on the bill of church growth or membership building (Rom.16:18). The most dangerous aspect of it however is that God would allow both the membership He added by Himself and the ones added by the mastery and the ingenuity of leaders to grow together to the end (Mat.13:25-29). But at the end, it's only those whom He added that are recognized by Him, but by that time, it would be too late (Mat.25:11-12). Do not wait to the end to hear that sorrowful voice of rejection: depart from me, you that works iniquity (Mark 7:23).

The following passages in Acts buttress the membership qualification. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls" (Act 2:41). Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Act 2:47). "Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand" (Act 4:4). "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) (Act 5:14). "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (Act 11:24). The qualification remains, those who believed!

ONE BODY

Jesus is coming for The Body without blemish, wrinkle, stain or spot (Eph.5:27). One body of many members (Rom.12:5; 1Cor.10:17; 1Cor.12:12-25). Where we see fornicators, adulterers, liars, thieves, drunks, not only claiming membership, but eldership, titles, etc of a church, it is an aberration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is a sin we must repent of, calling a gathering of such membership the church of the living God, regardless of the miracles, healing, breakthrough, testimonies, etc that may be recorded there. God will always honour His name anywhere it is being mentioned and that it not a sign of approval.

Consistently throughout the Bible, especially in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles, we see that membership of the body was not attached to a sect or denomination, but the body,

because the body is one, (Jn.17:11), though with many members (1Cor.12:14,20) and it is indivisible, just like our physical body cannot be divided. Christ doesn't have many bodies; only one body which cannot be divided and He is the head and we [individuals, not organization or denominations] are members, whether you are in America, Africa, Europe, etc. There are local assemblies which are the expression of that body, but they are not denominated. The true Church is where saints (i.e. believers), who have repented, baptized, saved and have been added to the body by God, not confirmation by the pastor-founders, creeds, ordination or membership card and they continue "stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Act 2:42).

There is no group or denominational salvation, every member appears before His God. Head of churches, ministries, groups, organizations and denomination will not appear on behalf of their members or followers. Your commitment and allegiance to such denomination or leadership is good, but scores no point whatsoever if it doesn't lead you to become member of the Body of Christ. That is why being a member of the body of Christ supersedes being a preacher of a thirty thousand member capacity church or a church with millions of branches. Those are necessary to boost religious ego, but irrelevant in the indices of Christ.

If our gathering has strong denominational bias, organizational structure, clergy-laity pattern, crowd-driven and employ various wonderful means to drive, populate or increase membership, ranging from prophetic and or motivational messages, anointing, miracle and breakthrough services, and other people-based strategies and systems, it is an indication that brilliant men are at work, not the simple Holy Spirit. If such gathering does not prepare people for rapture, then, it prepares them for tribulation. What shall it profit a rich, large and wonderful church that has no candidate for rapture! Rapture is only for children of God, just like Canaan was for children of Israel. God is looking for sons with child-like spirit (Luke 18:16; Luke 10:21). Heaven is for disciples, not just converts; matured sons, servants and bond servants.

THE TRUE CHURCH

Since the true church is spiritual, membership of it also is spiritual and cannot be physically joined, seen or founded; we are only born [again] into it just like we are born into natural family. As many as are born into this spiritual family through the born again experience are brethren and they only are the members of the body of Christ whose head is Christ. That is the true Church that will unite together with Christ in the rapture of His body (John 3:3-6; 1Cor.3:11). All others are organization of men, denominations which is physical.

The true Church is not founded, owned or headed by anyone but Christ. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence" (Col.1:18). "And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Cor.3:11). He is the head of his own church and we are all members of His body.

There are leaders in the Church for the purpose of effective workings just like there are parts and members that take more significant role in our physical bodies. But then, all the sense organs are located in the head and Christ is the head where all senses in the Church are located. The rest is all body and recognition is given to members with higher calling "For the perfecting

of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph 4:12-14).

It is God that call these people for a higher work among the people and for greater responsibility and accountability; for to whom much is given, much is required. As we have read in the verse above, He call them as brothers among brethren. God's strategy is not to take people from outside to use them in a place, but rather, He takes people among their own people and send them to their people. That was why Jesus was born as a man in order to win men: same with Moses and the disciples. He called them among their people to be used for their people. They are still part of us but we recognize them for their calling just as we all cannot be leaders. But this does not in any way make them gods or confer ownership of the Church on them, but to lead the flock. They are charged to "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1Pet.5:2-3). It is when the leaders lift Jesus up like Peter did, that God would draw men to Himself (John 12:32). It is Him that draws men, not our strategies (John 6:65).

God sees only one body and Christ is the head of that body. Pastor-founders, overseers, etc of churches are merely heading denominations and organizations, religious bodies, not the body of Christ. Being a member, worker or leader in such places does not mean you are a member of the body of Christ. The gigantic building with its beautiful altars and decorated inside is foreign to the body of Christ as the cloud is foreign to the ground. Church is people, not building or activities (Heb.3:6; 1Pet.2:5; 1Cor.3:16). Membership is only by birth. Jesus said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (Joh 6:44).

COMPANY OF UZZAH

While in many places, to be a worker in the *church*, you must first be a [confirmed] member, and to be a leader, you must be a [confirmed] worker for certain number of years, with recommendation, etc. While these are not bad, but must be seen in the proper perspective of what it is: religious service and exercise (1Tim.4:8). Commitment to men's vision and being found faithful as stewards in other men's matter is honourable and "moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1Cor.4:2), but these doesn't in any way mean working for God.

Being a worker or leader in God's vineyard means serving the Church, the people, not organizing crusades, activities or services. We can only labour together with God, but not for God. "For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye *are* God's building" (1Cor.3:6,9; Mat.9:37-38). If our labour is to help man build a religious group or ministry or even financial empire on the bill of religion, it doesn't count before God as labour. At best, our effort may be trying to reinforce what God is trying to pull down, operating in the way of Uzzah who tried to protect the Ark of the Covenant from falling and was killed by God, because he was trying to support what God was trying to pull down (2Sam6:3-7).

God wanted to pull the Ark down because the order of carrying it was wrong, even though the king, priest and many others were ignorantly excited and the whole nation was rejoicing with music, dancing and funfair in God's presence, glad that the presence of God had returned to the nation. If God is trying to pull down the organizations and churches built by men and all we do is to ignorantly support it with our membership, finance, etc, let us be sure that our labour does not support what God is trying to pull down, for God is a God of order and will not lower His standard because of man's ignorance. We may be sincere, but sincerely wrong. God is not looking for service or performance but obedience (1Sam.15:22).

You may be in a tight corner like Uzzah: if he had watched the ark fall and did not prevent it from falling, he would be in danger of death of the king. If he prevented it from falling, he would be in danger of God, he chose the latter. Whichever one he chose was death. The only saving grace was him never being there, but he was very sincere, even unto death, protecting what he thought was God, but was not (2Cor.6:17). As workers in the sanctuary of God, we can chose to please the founder or please God, but first, we must understand what God is doing.

Is God building an organization for man or building a body for His Son? Is He raising disciples or recruiting converts? Is He maturing sons or pampering kids? (Heb.5:12-14; Heb.6:1; 1Cor.3:1-3). Is He interested in thousands of people gathering together for religious activities or few people gathering to express the true Church?

Labouring and working for God is co-operating with Him to bring His kingdom into the hearts of men. Working for God is about feeding sheep, not amusing goats. It is not organizing crusades or revivals with media adverts to bring people. It is not having special programs to justify the hire, neither is it to display giftings, solve people's problems nor have a sense of working for God. Those are men's religious effort that put him in religious performance and give a sense of acceptance to God. While we rejoice in thousands responding for the altar call, God rejoices in those who eventually become disciples. Heaven is not for converts, but disciples. The commission is to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, not converts.

Leaders, churches, groups, ministries and denominations concerned more with gaining members than pointing men to Calvary are building human body, not Christ's body. We must not only present the power of His resurrection, but also the fellowship of His sufferings. "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake" (Php.1:29). Christ's benefits only must not be presented to the people, but also His sufferings. "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind" (1Pet.4:1). The way to the crown is always the way of the cross. The way to enjoying Christ's glory is to pass through Golgotha

LITTLE FLOCK

Through ages past, God has consistently worked through a remnant of people. From the time of Noah, to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel entering the Promised Land, to the calling of the disciples, through the dark ages and up till now, only a few are saved. God never saved by multitude because He is concerned with quality, not quantity. Jesus warned: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able (Luk 13:24). "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few

there be that find it" (Mat 7:14). Therefore, "... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Php.2:12).

We rejoice in the crowd, but God rejoices only in few. "For many are called, but few *are* chosen" (Mat.22:14; 1Cor.1:26). "Although the descendants of Israel are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, only a few will be saved" (Rom 9:27). We rejoice in offer admission to a prestigious university, but the glory is in the graduation, because not everyone offered admission eventually graduates. Admission letter is only a call for study; likewise salvation is only a call to discipleship. God is interested in the faith walk, discipleship, not in membership, duty or leading. We may pastor for thirty years, knowing the Bible in and out but were never discipled, as the case is in many. It is a conscious, deliberate and active effort with God. it is in the action, not in words. Now are ye my disciples when you DO. It is in the doing, not just believing. Satan also believes and trembles.

Are you a member, worker or leader of a religious body or the body of Christ? Do you belong to a religious group whose activities are different from every other? Remember, Christ only has one body; do you belong to that body or another; a body that can be joined, seen and have visible head? "*There is* one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph 4:4-6).