

Classic Christian Writings:

The New Testament often refers to believers in collective terms such as a family (Gal. 6:10), a body (1 Cor. 12:27), a chosen people (Col. 3:12), a household (Eph. 2:19), a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9) and as the church (Col. 1:18). At the same time, however, the importance of each individual believer is also emphasized. For example, the Apostle Paul, in reference to the body of Christ, writes that "Â...the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16). Notice that Paul emphasizes the importance of the whole body as well as the importance of "every supporting ligament" and "each part" of the body.

Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 12, he writes, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27). He stresses that each part of the body is essential to the well-being of the whole body, and that each member of the body of Christ is spiritually gifted in such a way as to be able to contribute to the whole body.

The Apostle Peter also emphasizes the collective nature of believers without losing sight of the importance of the individual members. On the one hand, he writes that believers collectively are "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to GodÂ..." (1 Pet. 2:9). On the other hand, he acknowledges the significance of the individual believers when he writes that "each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering GodÂ's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10).

In harmony with this, the New Testament often mentions individuals by name, and highlights their contributions to the body of Christ. Some of these individuals are given prominent attention (such as the Apostles and their traveling companions), while most are mentioned only briefly. Nevertheless, each of them played a very important role in the well-being of the Church. Their lives had been transformed by the grace of the Lord, and they were willing to be used by the Lord as instruments of His grace. Some of these individuals includeÂ...

Â...Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and NicolasÂ—seven men chosen to help with the distribution of food. These men were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:1-6).

Â...A disciple in Damascus named Ananias who, although he had heard bad reports about Saul, was obedient to the LordÂ's instructions and went to Saul and placed his hands on him (Acts 9:10-19).

Â...Tabitha (Dorcas), a disciple in Joppa "who was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36).

Â...Cornelius, who even before he became a Christian, was "devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly" (Acts 10:2).

Â...Barnabas who sold a field and donated the proceeds to the Apostles to help needy Christians (Acts 4:34-37). He was "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith" (Acts 11:24). He played a crucial role in helping Saul gain acceptance with the disciples in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28).

Â...Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, Saul and Barnabas who served as prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

Â...Lydia, a business woman in Philippi, who responded to the gospel and opened her house to Paul and his companions (Acts 16:14-15, 40).

Â...Apollos, a "learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures." He "spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately" (Acts 18:24-25).

Â...Phoebe, commended by Paul as one who had been a great help to many people including himself (Rom. 16:1-2).

Â...Priscilla and Aquila, PaulÂ's fellow workers who had risked their lives for him. Paul and all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them (Rom. 16:3).

Â...Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and PersisÂ—women who had worked very hard in the Lord (Rom. 16:6,12).

Â...Andronicus and Junias who were "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7).

Â...Gaius, known for his hospitality to the church (Rom. 16:23).

Â...Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus who had refreshed Paul's spirit as well as that of the Christians in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:17-18).

Â...Aristarchus, Mark and Justus—Paul's fellow workers for the kingdom. They had proved a comfort to him (Col. 4:10-11).

Â...Epaphras who was always wrestling in prayer for the Colossians. He had worked hard for the Colossians as well as for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12-13).

Â...Epaphroditus who served as the Philippians' messenger to Paul. He almost died for the work of Christ as he tried to make up for the help the Philippians could not give Paul (Phil. 2:25,30).

Â...Philemon, known as one who loved all the saints, and as one who had refreshed their hearts (Philemon 5,7).

Â...Nympha and Archippus, who had opened their homes as places for the church to meet (Col. 4:15; Philemon 2).

Â...Lois and Eunice (Timothy's grandmother and mother), noted for their sincere faith and for their godly impact upon Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5).

Â...Onesiphorus who often refreshed Paul and helped him in many ways (2 Tim. 1:16-18).

Â...Demetrius who was well spoken of by everyone, including the Apostle John (3 John 12).

These individuals, and countless others, played key roles in the growth and well-being of the early church. Their teaching, hard work, encouragement, prayers, generosity, faith, courage, perseverance, hospitality, obedience, good works and godly lives made a significant difference in the Church.

Your Important Role in the Church

Brothers and sisters, the same is true for the Church today. As a member of the body of Christ, your life and ministry affects the well-being of the Church. The body of Christ will grow and be built up only "as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16). In other words, your part is essential!

Therefore, I want to encourage you to renew your commitment to the Lord and to the work He has entrusted to you. If the Lord has gifted you to serve, then serve; to teach, then teach; to encourage, then encourage; to contribute to the needs of others, then do so generously; to lead, then govern diligently; to show mercy, then do so cheerfully (Rom. 12:7-8). Use whatever gift you have received "to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Pet. 4:10). The Lord will certainly bless others through your efforts, your generosity, your hospitality, your encouragement, your prayers, your hard work, your teaching, your perseverance, your obedience, and so forth. You are essential to His work.