

Title: “OIC Statement of Faith, Part 9: We believe in the Church, the Body of Christ.”

Key verses:

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NASB) – “For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Good morning, everyone. Today I am continuing my sermon series on the Statement of Faith of Osaka International Church. There are ten paragraphs in our statement of faith, and today we will be looking at Paragraph 9. Next month, we will look at Paragraph 10 and then this series will be finished.

The title of today’s message is “OIC Statement of Faith, Part 9: We believe in the Church, the Body of Christ.” Each of the titles of my sermons in this series has been a shortened version of the paragraph we are looking at, so today, as you can see, we will be looking at the doctrine of the Church, which is called “the body of Christ.”

Let’s read Paragraph 9 of our Statement of Faith:

We believe that the true Church is composed of all such persons, who have saving faith in Jesus Christ and have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the body of Christ of which He is the head. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13.

The true church.

The true church is composed of those persons who have saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Those persons who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. Regenerated = given new life.

These persons are united together into one body.

This is called the “body of Christ.”

Jesus Christ is the head of this body.

These points suggest to me an outline for today’s sermon:

1. The true church.
2. Saving faith in Jesus Christ.
3. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
4. Diversity and unity in the Body of Christ.
5. Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.

So, let us look at each of these points in more detail.

Part 1: The true church.

First, let’s look at the word “church.” This is the Greek word *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία). This word basically means “a gathered assembly.” More specifically, the syllable *ek* means “out from” or “to” and the Greek work *kalēō*, meaning “to call.” These are people who have been called to assemble. In the original Greek usage, it could refer to any assembly gathered for whatever reason – political, economic, or religious. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, this word *ekklēsia* refers to the congregation of Israelites. In the New Testament, this word is often used to refer to the Christian assembly, though in Acts chapter 19 it is used three times for an assembly of people gathered for other reasons.

In New Testament usage, the word *ekklēsia* basically refers to those persons who have been “called out” ... that is, called out of the world and called to follow Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Let’s look at 1st Corinthians 1:2 (ESV), where the Apostle Paul is addressing the church at Corinth – “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.”

Those people in Corinth who have placed their faith in Christ are said by Paul to be “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “called to be saints.” I told you last week that the word “sanctified” means to be “set apart.” Firstly, to be set apart FROM sin and from the world and its ungodly attitudes. Secondly, it means to be set apart TO God. Notice that Paul calls these Christians “saints.” That means “set apart ones” – those persons who are set apart from the world and belong to God. All Christians are saints – that word should not be limited to refer only to a special few Christians. All Christians are called to live sanctified lives.

That is the church – the gathered assembly of those persons set apart to Jesus Christ.

What do we mean by the “true church”? Obviously, this must mean something that is in contrast to what is false. Two things come to my mind when I see this phrase “the true church.” The first is what the Protestant Reformers saw in the fifteenth century: they saw the corruptions of the institutional church and they believed the true church had to be something else. Actually, even before the fifteenth century, there were several churchmen who saw numerous problems in the institutional church of the later Middle Ages and called for reformation. There were corrupt practices in the church and several questionable doctrines. I won’t describe these problems today, but when Martin Luther and the other Reformers of the fifteenth century made their critiques of the institutional church, they emphasized the key point that the way of salvation is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, and not based on any kind of religious rituals or the doing of good works. Not everyone who identified themselves with the Roman Catholic Church of that day were truly Christians. The true church is composed of those persons who have put their faith in Christ and rely on God’s grace, not on their own performance.

I told you that two thoughts come to my mind when I see this phrase “true church.” The second thought comes from one of the parables of Jesus where He highlights the fact that there will be two kinds of people within the community calling themselves Christian.

Let’s look at Matthew 13:24-30 (NIV). This is called the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, or the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (“tares” means “weeds”). Here it is – “Jesus told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ The owner’s servants came to him and said, “Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?” ²⁸ “An enemy did this,” he replied. The servants asked him, “Do you want us to go and pull them up?” ²⁹ “No,” he answered, “because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn”.’”

What Jesus is saying is that within the community here on earth that identifies itself with Jesus Christ, there will be both good seed and bad seed, both wheat and weeds, both genuine disciples of Christ and false disciples. There will always be some people in the community who are not true disciples. They participate in the activities and they may speak with Christian-sounding language, but their hearts are not right or they haven't really understood the gospel properly. They can be hard to identify sometimes. Jesus says we shouldn't try to uproot the weeds, because if we are too zealous to uproot false disciples, we could harm true ones. That's why when I share the gospel message from here in the pulpit or in conversation with somebody or with a small group of people, I concentrate on describing true doctrine and practice, and in that way, I hope to call Christians to a closer walk with Jesus and unbelievers to an examination of their life and beliefs, encouraging them to align themselves with Christ and put their faith in Him.

Of course, when there are people in the church who espouse wrong beliefs or immoral practice, we need to confront them. You see that in 1st Corinthians 5, where Paul rebukes the church for tolerating a professing Christian who is living immorally. You see it in Acts 8:9-24, where the Apostle Peter deals severely with the magician Simon Magus. Yes, sometimes we do have to confront grievous sin in the Christian community. But as Jesus' parable says, there will, unfortunately, always be some weeds among the wheat.

Let's move on to Part 2: Saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Our Statement of Faith says, "The true Church is composed of all such persons who have saving faith in Jesus Christ." *Saving faith in Jesus Christ*. Salvation is a work of God's grace, through faith. Not by any works that we do. You can't earn your salvation.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) – "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

By God's grace we are saved. Salvation is initiated by God, and we have done nothing to merit it. We have done nothing to earn salvation. Salvation does not happen as a result of works. It is by God's grace that we are saved, and it is through faith that we receive this gift.

The most famous verse in the Bible ... John 3:16 (NKJV) – "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Later, Jesus says this ... John 5:24 (NKJV) – "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."

John 1:12-13 (NKJV) – "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

God is the One who initiated the program of salvation, not us. God desires us to receive Christ and believe in Him. Verse 12 again: *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*

Two months ago on April 23rd, I covered this topic in detail when I did a sermon on Paragraph 6 of our Statement of Faith. If you would like to learn more, I recommend you take a look at that sermon. Here is Paragraph 6:

We believe that the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe, and that only such as receive Jesus Christ by faith are born of the Holy Spirit, and thus become the children of God.

Let's move on to Part 3 of today's message: Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration. The new birth. We must be born anew by God's Holy Spirit.

That was the topic of Paragraphs 4 and 5 of our Statement of Faith. Let's read Paragraph 5: We believe that man was created in the image of God but fell into sin and is therefore lost, and only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained.

Titus 3:4-5 (NASB) – “But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we did in righteousness, but in accordance with His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.”

Salvation is not accomplished by our deeds – rather, it is by God's mercy. And here in this passage we see the word “regeneration.” Re-generation – to generate once more; to make alive once more. It says here that God saves us “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.” This regeneration and renewing is described as a washing. This would refer to the washing away of our sins, the washing away of our guilt, and being made clean. We are cleansed and we are made alive once more. And this is done by the Holy Spirit.

This was promised in the Old Testament. Two months ago, I shared with you the promise found in Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NASB). The words were originally spoken to disobedient Israel, but after the coming of the Messiah, we Gentiles have been included in the invitation to follow Jesus. Let's read the promise recorded by Ezekiel where God says this – “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶ Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put My Spirit within you and bring it about that you walk in My statutes, and are careful and follow My ordinances.”

This is regeneration: we are cleansed from our sins and our old, stubborn hearts are replaced by a new heart and we are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Let's move on to Part 4: Diversity and unity in the Body of Christ.

Diversity and unity. Yes, we see diversity in the church. There are many types of people. Even in a mono-cultural church, you will see different personalities among the people. This is even truer in multicultural settings. But *together*, no matter what our background or personality is, we Christians are made into one people under God. Distinctions of race or social status or sex do not matter. In the early centuries of the Christian era, the pagan society marveled at the Christians. In the churches, people of differing social rank and of both sexes would mingle and associate with each other. They partook of the Communion service together, and they gathered for the agape meal. This display of egalitarian behavior was revolutionary in that society.

Galatians 3:27-29 (NASB) – “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man,

there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

We Christians "are all ONE in Christ Jesus." We are one, and yet we are still individuals.

1st Corinthians 10:17 (NASB) – "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread." We are many. But we are one body. In this verse, we see an allusion to the Communion service, which I mentioned a moment ago. As each member of the congregation partakes of the bread and the cup, we see that all of us are equals: we each approach God the same way, without distinction of race or social standing or sex ... each of us is a sinner saved by grace ... and in the Communion, we each receive the same amount of bread and wine ... no one is better than anyone else.

Romans 12:3-5 (NIV) – "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."

Look at our human bodies – we have many parts: hands, arms, legs, feet, head, mouth, eyes, stomach. Each of these have different functions, but are all part of the same body. Necessary parts of the body. In the same way, the Church is a body, and each of us have differing gifts and abilities, but each is necessary to the functioning of the whole body.

That thought brings me to the one Bible passage that is cited in Paragraph 9 of our Statement of Faith. It is 1st Corinthians 12:12-13 (NASB) – "For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. ¹³ For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

The Church is the Body of Christ. Each of us has been baptized into this body. Each of us has received the gift of the Holy Spirit, the one Spirit of God. This is designed to bring us into unity in the Body of Christ. I believe that if each of us would always be conscious of the Holy Spirit's leading in our hearts and always be conscious of those crucial Christian values of love and forgiveness and service, then we would see more unity among the members of our churches.

And there is something more. The Holy Spirit gives every individual Christian one or more spiritual gifts. These gifts are given to us in order to serve the wider Body of Christ.

Let's look at 1st Corinthians 12:4-7 (NASB) – "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. ⁶ There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. ⁷ But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

There are varieties of gifts and ministries distributed to the members of the church, but it is the same God, the same Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. And what is the purpose? Here in verse 7 we read that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each of us for the sake of the common good. The gifts are to be used for the whole Body of Christ, not just for yourself.

Verses 8 to 10 and verses 27 to 28 give a listing of some of these spiritual gifts. Also Romans 12:6-8. I won't read these for you today, but I encourage you to look them up.

Let's continue reading at 1st Corinthians 12:11 (NASB) – "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills."

The gifts are distributed to each Christian in accordance with how the Holy Spirit desires.

I have already read verses 12 and 13 to you. Though we are many and we have differing gifts, we are one body.

Let's read verses 14-18 (NIV) – "Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ 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 stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

Every part of the body is important. If every part of the body is functioning properly, the body will be healthy. Please, don't think that your part is insignificant. Everyone is important.

Verses 21-24 (NIV) – "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!' ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ 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, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it."

Those parts of the body that seem weaker or less honorable are still crucial to the proper working of the body. We need every member of the Body of Christ to be playing their part and exercising their gift. I appreciate everyone playing their part in this body, Osaka International Church. The ushers, the Sunday school teachers, the Fellowship team setting up the Fellowship room, the clean-up crew, and early in the morning we have the set-up team, the worship team practicing their songs, the sound system team, the internet technicians and their crucial task in this modern world. We have the office staff and the church council members and the finance committee. And I have only mentioned half of the tasks that I see being done here. Thank you all of you for your service at OIC.

Oh, I haven't mentioned one other part of the body: the mouth. Each Sunday we have a speaker here in the pulpit to deliver a message from God's Word. And we have a worship team leader leading the congregation in worship. The mouth is an important and a visible part of this body. But we can't do our task effectively without the hands and feet of you members playing your part. Thank the Lord for all of you.

Let me read another passage mentioning the body of Christ and gifts the Lord has given His church.

Ephesians 4:4-7 (NASB) – "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Here is a passage stressing unity. There is one body – all true Christians are members of this one body, the Christian Church. There is one Holy Spirit, one Lord Jesus Christ, one God the Father, each of them distinct Persons in the one Godhead, the Trinity. There is one true faith, the gospel message that we bring to the world. Entry into this body is symbolized by baptism, which signifies turning away from our old life and embracing Christian discipleship.

Let's read verses 11-13 (NASB) – “And He [Christ] gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Christ has given the church apostles and pastors and teachers for a certain purpose. Verse 12: to equip the saints. We have seen that word before – the saints: you folks, the ones set apart from the world and now a part of the church. It is for you folks that the pastors and teachers in the pulpit and Sunday School and small group Bible studies teach you lessons from God's Word ... for the purpose of *equipping YOU to do the work of the ministry*. It's not for the pastor and church council to do the ministry themselves. The work of the ministry is yours to do. The ministry are those various tasks I mentioned before, for which each of you has been given a spiritual gift.

And the goal for the Christian community is mentioned in verse 13. It is so that we can attain the unity of the faith ... and the knowledge of the Son of God ... and maturity. Unity ... knowledge of God and of His Son Jesus Christ ... and spiritual maturity.

There is more I could say on this matter, but I will wait until my next message. Next month, I will speak on the last paragraph of our Statement of Faith, which is also about the Church. It is about doctrine and the lifestyle of church members. So, you'll hear more next month.

Right now, I would like to move to the last part of today's message.
Part 5: Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV) – “Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

As each part of the body does its part, it is built up. Don't forget that love is a part of this process. The goal is to grow into a mature body. And Christ is the Head of that body.

Colossians 1:18 (NASB) – “He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.” Christ is the head of the body, the church. He will have first place in everything.

And let's look at the Great Commission one more time. Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV) – “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

All authority has been given to Jesus Christ, in heaven and on earth. He is our Lord, and He is to be obeyed. We are to bring this gospel message to all nations and make disciples, teaching

them to observe everything Christ has commanded. And He has promised to be with us throughout this current age, the age of the church. Let us get to work and help build up the church, the body of Christ.

I have come to the end of my message. But before I close, I wish to share with you one of my favorite hymns ... perhaps my topmost favorite hymn. This hymn contains many of the themes that I have outlined in my series on the OIC Statement of Faith and especially in today's sermon on the church. I have asked the worship team to lead us in singing this hymn today. Before we do, I would like to highlight some of the words of the hymn.

This song is entitled "The Church's One Foundation." Here are the opening lines:

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the Word.

Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church. And each member of the church is a new creation, born again by the Spirit, baptized in water as a symbol of new life, and instructed in the Word of God.

Let's continue with the hymn:

From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

As we saw with previous messages on our Statement of Faith, Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, who came down from heaven and was incarnated – He took on human flesh in order to redeem our human flesh. He came to earth to be the sacrifice for our sins – He shed His blood for us, He died for us.

Let's continue:

Elect from every nation,
Yet one over all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth.

From every nation there are followers of Christ. And yet within this diversity, we are united by a common faith in a common Lord. Many of you know that in my younger days I took a one-year-long trip around the world. It was so nice to be able to find brothers and sisters in the faith in many places in distant corners of the earth, and I have several stories I could tell you (but not right now).

The third stanza of the hymn talks about toil and tribulation, but in the end the church will find victory and rest. The fourth stanza talks about union with the Triune God and we will dwell with Him forever.

That is the end of today's message. Let us remember our Lord Jesus Christ and play our part in the Body of Christ. God bless you all.