

The Body of Christ

'The image of the church as the body of Christ looks inward (to the mutual relationship of believers as the members of the body) and upward (to the relationship between the body and its head) but not outward (to the relationship between the church and the world). The view that Paul regarded the church as an extension of the incarnation in the world is surely excluded by the very fact that the body metaphor maintains a clear distinction between Christ as head and the church as body'.

The Body of Christ, R.Y.K. Fung The Dictionary of Paul and his Letters

Introduction

The Letters of the Apostle Paul use the exact phrase 'the body of Christ' only four times (Rom 7:4, 1 Cori 10:16 Eph 4:12, 1 Cor 12:27)

Equivalent expressions include phrases like

- The body of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27)
- His body of flesh (Col 1:22)
- His glorious body (Phil 3:21)
- His body (Eph 1:23, 5:30, Col 1:24)
- My body (1 Cor 11:24)

Closely related to those are

- The body (1 Cor 11:29, Eph 5:23, Col 1:18, 2:19)
- One body (Rom 12:5, 1 Cor 12:17, 12:13, Eph 2:16, 4:4, Col 3:15)

These 21 phrases may be classified into three uses

1. They refer physically to the incarnate body of Jesus
2. They refer symbolically to the Lord's Supper
3. They refer metaphorically to the Church

Group Work

Look at the following passages from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and identify and summarise what the image of the church as Christ's body communicates.

Ephesians 1:18-23

¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is **his body**, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 2:14-16

¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in **one body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Ephesians 3:2-6

²Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. ⁴In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. ⁶This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together **of one body**, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 4:1-6

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴**There is one body** and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that **the body of Christ** may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, 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**. ¹⁶From 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.

Ephesians 4:25

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of **one body**.

Ephesians 5:23

²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, **his body**, of which he is the Saviour. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for **we are members of his body**.

Summary Observations

The Church as the body of Christ

1. Unity
2. Multiplicity
3. Diversity

Christ as the head of his body

1. Connection
2. Care
3. Control

Implications for Planting