

WELCOME TO JESUS' CHURCH_ *It's His Body*

Last week we saw that Jesus' church existed without buildings or borders. It was a community of people united on the single foundational truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It included men and women from virtually every social and racial background who accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins were added to the number of the saved. Though the church then spread out from Jerusalem into every major city for 1000's of miles, it was always still one universal spiritual kingdom.

Today we'll look at the first of 3 word pictures of the church in Paul's letter to believers in Ephesus. After a lengthy description of the spiritual blessings to be found in Christ, Paul writes this in **Ephesians 1:15-23**:

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better. ¹⁸ I pray also 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 the saints, ¹⁹ and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, ²⁰ which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him 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 title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come ²² And God placed all things under His (Christ's) 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.

Catch the image Paul uses here of the church as a body_ with Jesus as the head. It is the most frequently used metaphor used to describe the church, perhaps because it can be easily understood. In every instance found in scripture_ in **Romans 12, 1st Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4**_ it is referring to a single congregation in a city. Yet, these churches were made up of several house groups_ cells, if you will, within the same body. The indication is that the church met in various homes often, but also came together periodically_ perhaps even each and every Sunday_ for further edification. These large gatherings would take place outside or in the temple courts_ or some other arena. (See article)

I wonder what it would be like today if we viewed it that way; you know, instead of **so many churches** in Rockford, that we understood that there was **really just one**. In **Ephesians 4:4** Paul insists that this is the case. Oh, we might have the church that met in "a house" on Guilford, or Riverview, or Alpine, or wherever_ but we saw that we were all part of a single body. That could be a game changer.

Yet, just because a group meets_ be it in a house, a cathedral, or a in a field_ and calls itself a "church" doesn't necessarily mean it is Christ's church. His church lets Him call the shots. They let Him set the course. They get their direction from Him. That also means His church follows that direction, listens to His plans, and obeys His orders.

This is one of the fears people have of house churches. There may be little to no accountability. The church may be led by someone without a good grasp on theology or Bible doctrine, leading the group in a very serendipitous manner. Or, perhaps even worse_ someone who thinks he has a gift of interpretation can have some very cultish beliefs that border on heresy_ and they can persuade ignorant people to go in a direction that is quite contrary to the word of God. Of course, this can happen in larger groups that meet in "church buildings" as well_ but because of the check and balance of elders and deacons, pastors and teachers, it is typically not as likely to happen.

The temptation is for me to stress how the “*body metaphor*” calls for each member of the church to be involved and work together for the common goal. This is the emphasis in **Romans 12** and **1st Corinthians 1** and even to a large extent in **Ephesians 4:11-16**. **“It was He (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until 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. Then 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 men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 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.”** So, yes, it would be legitimate to talk about the role we all should play as members of His church.

Yet, the Spirit has prompted me to focus on the main point in that last verse as it applies directly to **verse 1:22-23**: **“God placed all things under (Christ’s) feet and appointed HIM TO BE HEAD over everything for the church, which is His body...”** See, though elsewhere the image illustrates our connection to one another, here the primary message has to do with the body as a whole (*the church*) and it’s connection to the Head.

A body without a head is incapable of doing anything worthwhile. And any part of the body that is disconnected from the head is not only dysfunctional, it is also disabling_ and in time will be subjected to decay. Perhaps you’ve awakened to find your arm or leg is still “*asleep*.” I’d always thought it was because blood circulation had been cut off_ but it’s really because of a condition known as “*paresthesia*” where nerves have been compressed or pinched to the point that they aren’t able to get clear signals from the corresponding nerve centers in the brain. I do not make light of this, but when someone has a seizure, their body or appendages may either flop around uncontrollably, or slip into a state of rigidity. Both of these extremes are caused because of electrical impulses that also interfere with communication coming from the brain.

Maybe you’ve heard of someone running around like **“a chicken with their head cut off.”** Believe it or not, at least for a few moments this actually can happen. Yet, the body runs aimlessly, flops over and seizes a time or two and then goes limp. According to Jesus in **Revelation 3**, that’s what happened to the church in Sardis. They had a lot of activity, appearing to be very much alive, but they were in fact already dead. How can this be? In **Colossians 2:19** Paul describes those who follow the ways and rules of men rather than Jesus as those who **“...have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.”**

Now though I’ve chosen images to represent this that might be cute or comical_ there is nothing cute nor comical about a church that has been cut off from Christ. It is more gruesome than anything in a horror film. It is more ghastly than anything Isis has ever done.

Yet, **we are the Body of Christ**_ that is if we are connected with Christ. If not, He invites us to be united in with Him in baptism and find the fullness that He promises through the body His church.