

Title: The Body of Christ
Date: August 9, 2020
Subject: Pictures of the church – the body
Scripture: Ephesians 1:15 - 23

Our human bodies have tremendous capabilities. We can see a candle's flame 30 miles away on a dark, clear night. We can smell a single drop of perfume diffused in a three-room apartment. We can taste .04 ounce of table salt in 530 quarts of water. Our sense of touch can detect a pressure that depresses the skin .00004 inch on the face or fingertips. We can tell where a sound is coming from even when it arrives at one ear just .0003 second before its arrival at the other ear. Here's what happens in the average adult in 24 hours: heart beats 103,689 times, blood travels 168,000,000 miles, breathe 23,040 times while inhaling 438 cubic feet of air, hair grows .01714 inch and you exercise 7,000,000 brain cells.

READ Ephesians 1:15 – 23.

Each chapter of Ephesians packs a mother lode of material about who God is and what he's done for us that can be mined for weeks and weeks and weeks. This section is no different. But our focus is going to be limited to the pictures we have of this entity known as the church. The next picture is that of a body.

A. The church as a body

The human body serves as a brilliant illustration of the church. Consider the wonders and complexities of the body. Our musculo-skeletal system provides strength and support so we can stand upright. The digestive system enables chocolate cake, tacos and Cheerios to be converted into energy. The circulatory system moves the nutrients and helps to clean the body. The nervous system senses pain like when we stub our toe. Each system is important but no system can do the entire job by itself.

We can get more specific as to the intricacy of the body. Each of our eyes has 107 million cells. Every square inch of skin has 450 touch cells enabling us to feel. The DNA in each of our cells would fill 600 thousand-page books.

The composition of the body of Christ is presented in 2:16. In one body God has reconciled both of them to the cross. Who are the both of them.? We go back to the beginning of the section to v. 11. Gentiles are brought into relationship with Jews. Verse 16 clarifies they are brought together in one body.

Chapter 3 continues the analogy of the body and the integration of Jews and Gentiles. V. 6. It's a mystery, something that had been hidden but now has been revealed by God. The bringing together of Gentiles and Israel in one body has been revealed through the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. Those who come to faith in Christ are placed into one body, an organic unity, by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12 -14).

God's plan has always been to have one body brought about by Christ. God wasn't going to have two bodies or several options. The Lord didn't create an updated version of Judaism but something totally new.

Updates often cause difficulties. Such was the Friday fiasco at VBS. When I turned on the sound-booth computer, I noticed it said there were updates. I thought there was plenty of time as it was shortly after 8:30 and I wanted to have things up and running by at least 9. I hit the update and restart button. Weeeelllllll... It didn't go that smoothly. The little swirly-twirly-thingie kept doing its swirly-twirly-thing and the updates went from 17% to 18% as the minutes ticked by and it was getting close to 9, then 9, then 9:05. Jeff came to the rescue and started looking at things and we prayed and hoped the machine would get done with what it was doing in time. Thank the Lord the last little bit of update went quickly.

However, the video was partially on the screen and partially off. Some of the sound sources weren't sounding and then there were other issues during the opening assembly. Jeff was finally able to rectify the issues in time for our closing assembly.

That's the way human generated updates can operate. They aren't always perfect and they don't provide what they promise. God is different. He could have just done an update but then people may have thought, "Well, it's just an update. What's the big deal?" God wanted to make a big deal so he created the church, the body of Christ.

I think the Lord has a sense of humor. And I think he's put it in his word. So I think it's okay to use my sanctified imagination, hopefully it's sanctified imagination, to imagine what it was like when the Lord spoke to Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 about the body. I can imagine the Lord directing the super serious, studious scribe to write, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?" That's quite the image. Just one massive eyeball.

I can envision Paul being surprised, maybe even amused, just a little. He may have talked back to the Lord, "No, wait. You said what?" And the Lord repeated himself. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?" "That's what I thought you said. You don't really want me to write that, do you? It sounds rather absurd. Out of character for you. What are people going to think?" Then the Lord repeated...again and added, "If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?" Another richly vivid image – one ginormous 6 foot ear.

The Lord also colorfully communicated about the necessity of all parts, unity and diversity by imagining a part of the body rejecting the rest because it wants to be a different part. There's a reminder that the Holy Spirit put the body together the way he wanted it and that all parts are important. 1 Corinthians 12 has much more to say but I tried not to dawdle too long there.

I heard of a young man who was destined to be a prolific college football fullback. He worked in a lumber camp as a way to build muscle and endurance. An accident caused him to lose part of his big toe. It didn't seem like a big deal at first but he found the loss of a small part negatively impacted his agility and fast, powerful starts. All parts are essential.

Individualism and isolation run counter to Christ's intent. It's not about a single person. There is no lone wolf or Lone Ranger. It's not about you or me. It's about us and the universal us in the body of Christ.

B. the privileges of being in the body

As amazing as the rest of our physical bodies are, they need to remain connected to the head. The most important part of the body is the head. We understand that truth and try to protect ours from injury. Our brains are housed in our heads. The brain is the processing and regulating center for everything that happens in the body. It sends signals telling each part what it is to do and how to respond to things like that stubbed toe.

Jesus is the head of his body. He is supreme over everything - far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, every title, not only in the present age but in the age to come. Nothing supersedes him. Everything is beneath his feet. Those who are under someone's feet have been conquered or are in a subservient position. Christ is in the position of head for the church.

We need to be clear that we're under him. We've been conquered in a sense. We had been enemies at war with God. Jesus fought an unfair fight. He used the ultimate weapon – his amazing love to defeat us and win our souls over to his side. We're under him, not so he can gloat over those he has conquered. Rather it's a place of protection. We've joined him and he'll prevent evil from beating us. We have become his servants.

Peace with God. 2:14 - 18. Peace, peace, peace, peace. Jesus establishes peace with God and people. He is the one who reconciles, the one who brings people into a right relationship with God. The offer is for those who were near the truth of God (the Jews) and those who were far away (the Gentiles). Now through Jesus and this body, he's able to bring people to God.

Unity. 4:4. Oneness plays a major role in the first paragraph of chapter 4. Right in the middle of this discussion is a statement that there is one body. One body. Not several. The whole reinforces the connectedness of those are in the body of believers. It's not limited to a local church. It needs to happen here, but it's talking about throughout the world, throughout time, there is one body of believers comprised of those who truly know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

The body of Christ is to be the end of racial disharmony. God's desire is to bring people from all ethnicities together into the church. In Paul's time there were two people groups - Jews and non-Jews. At least that's the way the Jewish world thought. Paul is saying that all people, no matter the color of their skin, the region of the world they live in, are brought together in the church.

Chuck Smith founded Calvary Chapel. One of his many speaking engagements took him to an island of Indonesia. There he met a man who'd been the chief of a tribe who practiced cannibalism. The chief had marvelously come to know Jesus Christ as his Savior. He presented Smith with some of his weapons he'd used to kill his enemies and talked about the change that had come into his life because of Jesus. The two men hugged and Smith said he could sense the love of Jesus flowing from this other man and how they were united -- a "civilized" man from California and the other a former cannibal -- united because of Jesus.

Those who are in the body share in the promise in Christ Jesus (3:6). The key word in the verse is *together*. It's reflecting back to the former hostility between Jew and Gentile that has been eliminated in Christ.

Together we're heirs of the promise in Christ. It's the promise of eternal life, forgiveness of sins and a future in heaven.

C. The function of the body.

Christ, as the head, gives out orders to the rest of the body. He directs the activities of the body. He organizes the body so that it functions the best way possible. He wishes for his body to follow his lead. We're to live in submission to the head. Sometimes his signals are short-circuited by our sin or lack of desire in the parts of the body who don't want to cooperate with the head.

The head is the great communicator of truth. He came from God full of grace and truth to tell of the way for people to know God. He came. He spoke. He left. He has chosen the church as his replacement as his key communication group. 1:22, 23. The church is the fullness of Christ. The church is to be the full expression of Christ to the world. This theme is continued two chapters later.

3:10, 11. The church is the vehicle through which God desires to communicate his plan for people. Paul phrases the subject to be communicated more eloquently through the words of Scripture God spoke to him – "the manifold wisdom of God." This entails God's plan that was carried out through Jesus Christ. It's through this body that he determined humanity should learn they can be reconciled to God through Christ's work on the cross.

The vice president of church ministries for the Christian Missionary Alliance writes, "Because he is the head, Christ dictates the purpose of the local church. We cannot determine this by a congregational vote or the preference of the majority. The head has already stated that its purpose is to be an outward-focused application of Christ's love and proclamation of the gospel with the clear intent of winning people to faith in Christ" (Terry Smith, Alliance Life, Jan/Feb 2020, p.6).

4:11 – 16. Bodybuilding. The body is to be built up (vv 12, 16). It's to grow. It's to be strengthened. It's to mature. We're to grow up into him, into our connection with the head.

Did you ever notice how babies, toddlers and young children have heads that are seemingly too big for their bodies? If their heads kept growing at the rate as the rest of the bodies, their heads would become really big. But what happens is the rest of the body catches up with the head.

This is what's to happen to the church. We are to grow up into Christ the head. This does not for one nanosecond imply, infer or otherwise suggest that we become divine. Never going to happen. We remain fully human. Our aim is to be more connected with him. We play catch-up because we started from a sinful place. We endeavor to become more like Christ, grow in knowledge of him, and wisdom and understanding and faith. We're to be involved in reproducing his Christ-like character. There's a whole lot of growing that needs to be going on.

Each part is absolutely essential to the health and well-being of the family as each person has a job in which he/she is to serve so the church may grow. Christ has given gifted people to the church. Some of these are in official positions like pastors and some aren't. The reality is that everyone is a gifted person as all have

been given spiritual gifts and abilities and temperaments and opportunities by the Holy Spirit. These are intended to be the tools and building materials that help build up the body.

One of the main construction techniques of the body is love. It's a Christ level caring for each other. It's shown as the body works together for the cause of Christ. This was in evidence this past week at VBS as the staff volunteered to communicate the love of Jesus to children and their families.

The goal is to reach unity in the faith and knowledge and knowledge of the Son of God (4:13). This will enable the entire body to comprehend Christ. It's kind of like the body is a mega computer or series of computers linked together to perform some task. The task for the body of Christ is to learn more about Christ, to grow in him.

Speaking the truth (4:25). Societies, tribes and cultures in our world are built around the principle that lying is a highly esteemed trait. The ability to mislead people is rewarded. Honesty and truthfulness are viewed as weaknesses. That's part of how the world system functions.

Those who know Christ as Savior are to behave in a different manner. We're to be bound up in truthfulness and honesty. Lying is to be part of the past. We're to be people who have no false front. We're not trying to mislead others. We share what is true and do so in a loving manner.

The reason for this is that we're part of the body. We belong to each other. The other members of the body deserve truth. Lying to others in the body weakens the connective tissue.

There's another aspect of telling the truth. We communicate what is true as in Jesus being the truth. This was covered to an extent earlier.

A psychologist from Union College (Jack Lipton) and a graduate student from Columbia University (R. Scott Bulione) presented their findings at a meeting of the American Psychological Association on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestras perceived each other. The percussionists were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving. String players were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and unathletic. The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose "loud" as the primary adjective to describe the brass players. Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem, described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical. How could an orchestra with these perceptions and attitudes toward each other come together to make music? The answer is: regardless of how they view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership and guidance of the conductor. (*Today in the Word*, June 22, 1992).

While the body of Christ shouldn't tolerate such low opinions of others, the principle of coming together is valid. We come together under the leadership and guidance of the Head conductor to play the music of His love and grace for us, of our love for him and our love for other people so they may know him as Savior.