The Biblical Theology of the Church

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THE CHURCH AS THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

The Gathering Church of Christ

We have seen the Old Testament people of God first as a worshipping assembly, then as a holy people, and finally as a witness, a city set on a hill. As we turn to the new Covenant, we meet at once the witness and mission of Christ and of those whom he calls. We will first reflect on the witness of Christ's church, then on its worship, and finally on its fellowship as Christ's body.

1. The Lord Comes to Gather

'Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord' (Lk. 2:11). The herald angel announces to the shepherds the long-promised coming of the Lord. He is not only the Lord's Anointed (Lk. 2:26); he is the anointed Lord, the glory of his people Israel (Lk. 2:32). His name is Jesus, for it is he who shall save his people from their sins (Mt. 1:21). The inspired witnesses present him in the Gospels as the Lord of creation, obeyed by winds and waves (Mt. 8:27). He is Master of life and death, of men and demons, with authority not only to heal the sick but to forgive sins (Mk. 2:8-11). He is more than a prophet, for he is the Son of God, the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us so that we might behold his glory, the light that shines in the darkness (Mt. 16:16; Jn. 1:1-5, 14, 18).

He comes to earth on a mission from the Father, so that he might gather the remnant flock, the people given him of the Father (Lk. 12:32; Jn. 17:2; 10:27-29). He looks with compassion on the people as sheep scattered, without a shepherd (Mt. 9:36; 26:31). Ezekiel prophesied that the Divine shepherd would come to gather his flock and deliver them from the false shepherds (Ezk. 34). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, undertakes that task of gathering. Although he is the Lord, he is also the Servant. He comes as the Sent of the Father, not simply to call the
unfaithful stewards of God’s kingdom to account (Mt. 21:37, 38), but also to summon sinners to the feast of the kingdom (Lk. 14:16-24; Mt. 22:2-14). He calls first the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5; 15:24); when Gentiles come seeking him, he views their coming as a sign of his impending death and resurrection (Jn. 12:20-33). When he is lifted up, first to the cross, then in glory, he will draw all men unto him. The gathering work of Christ awaits the glory to be given him of the Father. The Lord who gathers calls his disciples to be gatherers with him. In a solemn saying, Jesus declares, 'He who does not gather with me scatters' (Mt. 12:30; Lk. 11:23). After the resurrection, Jesus calls and commissions his disciples to this gathering task. They are to be labourers in an abundant harvest, praying that the Lord will thrust forth yet more labourers (Mt. 9:37f.). They are to be fishers of men, called by the Lord who commanded them to thrust out into the deep, and who filled their nets to the bursting point with fish (Mt. 4:19; Lk. 5:10).

2. The Church is Called to Gather

Because Christ’s church is a missionary church, the order of the church serves the order to the church to make disciples of the nations. Under the dome of St. Peter’s in Rome are inscribed in Latin the words of Jesus to Peter: ‘You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church’ (Mt.16:18). It is not only the church of Rome that has emphasized the building of the church in an institutional sense to the detriment of the mission of the church to the world. It is for this reason, in part, that Ralph Winter has concluded that mission is the function of the church as sodality rather than modality. The missionary orders rather than the ecclesiastical hierarchy promoted the mission of the church of Rome. Among the churches of the Reformation, mission societies rather than denominational organizations have carried the gospel to the ends of the earth. There is no disputing how often this has been the case, although Winter surely goes too far when he tries to represent the Apostle Paul and those who accompanied him as a kind of para-ecclesiastical missionary team. It is clear that Paul looked at the matter quite differently. He argued at length and with passion for his authority in the church as an apostle, and for his calling as the apostle to the Gentiles. In relation to the order of the church, he could not have conceived of his work more centrally. He was fulfilling the gospel, bringing to fruit the promises of the Old Testament. Paul the Apostle was a wise master-builder of the church. Through his ministry, the Gentiles glorified God for his mercy. Paul uses formal language in describing his official ministry as Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 15:15-20).

The Apostolic, Missionary Church

Indeed, the fact that the apostolic office is both foundational and missionary has abiding significance for the church. The foundational aspect of the

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17 Ralph D. Winter, 'Churches Need Missions Because Modalities Need
The apostles' work was accomplished in the apostolic age. They were witnesses of the resurrection, who had seen with their own eyes the risen Lord (Acts 1:21, 22; 10:41, 42; 1 Cor. 15:8). They were organs of revelation, having received from the Lord what they delivered to the church (Eph. 3:4, 5; Heb. 2:3; 1 Cor. 15:3). But they were also missionaries, sent into the world with the only Name by which men can be saved. The Gospel of Matthew joins the foundational word of Jesus to the apostles (Mt. 16:18, 19), to the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). Mission is not an addendum to the doctrine of the church. It is the calling of the church in the world. If it is neglected or abandoned, the life of the church, not just its work, is threatened.

The Father's Missionary Love

The missionary character of Christ's church does not issue only from the command of Christ. It flows from the revelation of the Father that Christ provided. He sends the disciples into the world as the Father sent him into the world (Jn. 17:18; 20:21). How did the Father send him? With authority, of course, but also in grace and love. In the teaching of Jesus, the astounding love of God is set forth. Jesus is the Beloved Son, but the Father has not spared him; instead he has sent him to give his life a ransom for many. In the parable of the welcoming Father, Jesus tells of the joy that his Father has in receiving lost sinners home again (Lk. 15:11-32). The story shows God's amazing grace, for– as the prodigal confesses – he does not deserve to be called the son of his father, or even to be made one of his servants. But the father receives him as a son and welcomes him with a feast. The older brother is furious because he knows well his brother's sin, but does not know at all his father's love. The key to the parable is the contrast between the older brother and Christ himself. Jesus told the story as one of three parables after he had been criticized for eating with publicans and sinners. In each story he shows the joy, and the feast, that accompanies the finding of the lost. 'There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents' (Lk. 15:7, 10). Jesus understands heaven's joy, and the love of the Father that rejoices in finding the lost. Jesus is the seeking shepherd of the first parable; he is like the woman of the second parable, who turned her house upside down to find a coin. The shepherd sought one sheep of a hundred, the woman one coin of ten; but the older brother would not seek one brother of one. In fact, not only did he fail to go to the far country to seek him, he even refused to eat with him when he came home. Not so Jesus. He, the true older brother, knows his Father's heart. He goes seeking publicans and sinners. He eats with them, and calls them to come home to the Father.

The gospel is the message of God's redeeming love in sending his own Son into the world. Those who understand that love will be driven to share it. They will not only rejoice to sit down with other redeemed sinners in heaven's feast: they will seek other sinners in Christ's name to call them home. As Christ was sent, so he sends them, and the dynamic of mission is the heart of the love of God. Again we
see that mission is not an addendum. Rather, it is evidence that the church understands the gospel. The love that fulfils the law, as Jesus taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan, is the love of compassion, love modelled on the love of God.

Mission: Going Out and Coming In

The witness of Christ's church to the world is not expressed only in the going of Christ's disciples to the ends of the earth. The outgoing, centrifugal mission of the New Testament church does not simply replace the ingathering, centripetal movement of the Old Testament witness. The church is still a city set on a hill. Indeed, even its mission to other lands and cultures is a continuation of the task of calling the nations to worship at Mount Zion. The difference is that the Zion to which people are now called is the heavenly Zion, the Jerusalem above that is our mother (Gal. 4:26). Men and women of every tribe, tongue, people and nation are now called to join the heavenly worship described in Hebrews 12. Because we do not have a continuing city here, we can no longer call men to an earthly centre. Because we do have a continuing city above, our call goes to the whole world. The heavenly centre for the worship of the whole earth accounts for the mission to all the world. On the other hand, we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together on earth. Our local assemblies therefore become Mount Zion in miniature. Israel's calling to show to the world the holiness of the true people of God is maintained and deepened. Paul teaches this when he calls upon the church to 'Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe' (Phil. 2:14, 15). The Apostle uses language from Deuteronomy 32:5, but with an interesting reversal. Moses, dealing with the perpetual murmurings and questionings of Israel in the wilderness, described them as a perverse and crooked generation, corrupted and blemished. Paul urges the church to forsake the sins of the people of old and to be what Israel was not.

The holiness of the church is to be shown particularly in love for one another (Jn. 13:35). The world will be struck by the changed life-style of the Christian community, and will speak evil of it (1 Pet. 4:4). But the world cannot ignore that love that binds Christ's disciples together in a unity of heart (Jn. 17:23).

B. The Church as the Worshipping Assembly

The worshipping assembly of Christ becomes Mount Zion for those who are drawn in by seeing the lives and hearing the praises of those who know the Lord. Paul says of a well-ordered service of worship that its prophetic ministry will fulfil Old Testament promises, for the stranger who enters will fall down on his face and say that 'God is among you indeed!' (1 Cor. 14:25; Is. 45:14; Zc. 8:22, 23).
Peter emphasizes the place of worship when he writes that 'you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (1 Pet. 2:9). No doubt the praises of God serve as a witness to the nations. Yet praise to God is offered not for the sake of the Lord who is adored.

1. God's Glory Evokes Worship

All worship is qualified by the transcendent glory of God. The Psalms celebrate God's glory in the works of his hands. The heavens thunder the glory of God's power (Ps. 18:7; 19:1; 33; 147). God is also the Governor of men and nations, shaping history by his will (Ps. 145:13; 46:10). Above all God is to be praised for his work of salvation (Ps. 18; 145:7, 8, 18-21). His hills skipped like lambs when he led forth his people like a flock (Ps. 78:52; 114:4, 6). But the crescendo of praise builds toward the great work of salvation that God will do in the latter days. God will come and new songs of praise will be sung (Ps. 96:1, 11-13). Isaiah adds prophetic chorales praising the glory of God that will be revealed when all flesh shall see it together (Is. 40:5; 58:8; 59:19; 60:1).

Because worship praises the Lord himself, and does not simply celebrate his works, it moves from thanking God for what he has done to adoring him for who he is. The psalmists sing 'the glory due to his name' (Ps. 29:2). His mighty acts reveal his transcendent power and wisdom. We are called to marvel not only at his wisdom displayed in the cosmos and the ages, but at his wisdom in forming and knowing us personally (Ps. 139:1-18). Just as we praise God most for his deeds of salvation, so of all his attributes we are most overwhelmed by his saving love, the spring of our redemption. There is therefore a climactic and dramatic movement to our worship. Worship spirals upward from the works of God to the attributes of God, from his sovereignty in creation to his sovereignty in salvation. 'For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever!' (Rom. 11:36).

2. God's Presence Evokes Worship

The supreme heightening of worship is evoked by the very presence of God. The angels who cry 'Holy, holy, holy!' are not reciting a litany, but are responding to the ever fresh and expanding revelation of the presence of God as it sweeps over them, wave upon wave. The climax of worship is always found in the immediate presence of the Lord. We have not only heard with our ears of his wonderful deeds and his glorious attributes; our eyes have seen him, and with Job we repent in dust and ashes (Jb. 42:5, 6).

We have seen how central the presence of the Lord was for the worship of Israel: God must dwell in the midst; a way must be opened into his presence. The Psalmist longs for the courts of the Lord, not to enjoy the spectacle of
worship, but to meet with God (Ps. 84; 63:1-3; 122:1). 'My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God'? (Ps. 42:2).

3. God's Holiness Demands Exclusive Worship

Because 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29), his own holy nature and will determine all of our worship. The Lord demands exclusive worship: 'Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God' (Ex. 20:5; 34:13). The forms, as well as the object, of our worship must be exclusive. God will not tolerate worship through idols, but insists that he be worshiped in the way that he has commanded ( Dt. 12:30-32). All this is to say that worship is total commitment. It is nothing if not extravagant. To withhold anything is to fail to worship (Dt. 6:4-9).

4. Fulfilment in Christ

When we consider the church as the worshipping assembly of Jesus Christ, we see how all these biblical themes for worship are brought to fulfilment. Old Testament prophecy proclaims the great day of worship when the glory of God will be revealed. That climax comes with Jesus Christ. The works of God are manifested afresh in the miracles of Jesus. He shows his power over creation as Lord. But the wonder of worship overflows when the grace of God is revealed. The works and words of Jesus reveal the fulness of that grace. He glorifies the name of the Father as he is brought by the Father's love for sinners to the cross. In Jesus Christ God comes and is present. The extravagance of Mary's worship shows that she perceives his person as well as his work as he goes to Jerusalem to die (Jn. 12:1-8). Jesus shows his zeal for pure worship as he cleanses the temple, but he also announces that he is the true temple (Jn. 2:19-21). Worship in truth is worship of the Father in and through the Son.

The church with joyful worship hails Jesus Christ as Lord. Christians are designated as those who call upon his name (Acts 9:14). The church is the assembly of those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:2). This is a standard Old Testament expression for the worship of God (Gen. 4:26). The prayer 'Maranatha', associated with the Lord's Table, reflects the way in which the worship of the church centred on the future coming of the Lord in glory, as well as his presence in the Spirit (1 Cor. 16:22).¹⁸

The worship of the church is centred on God's revelation in Christ in two ways. First the worshippers enter heaven itself, where Jesus is. The visions of the book of Revelation present the glory of the risen Lord who, with the Father and the Spirit, is the object of Christian worship. As we have seen, Hebrews 12

powerfully presents this access of worship. On the other hand, Christ is also present in the gathering on earth where two or three are gathered in his name (Mt. 18:20). The table fellowship of the upper room is continued with the risen Christ. The jealousy of God that demands exclusive worship now requires that we approach the Father only in and through the Son. The church therefore gathers in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4). The mercy-seat in the tabernacle remained empty. No image or likeness could be placed there, because that seat was reserved for the One who is the image of the invisible God (Co. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3).

Awareness of the presence of the Lord creates in the church a longing that surpasses that of the psalmist. The fellowship that hears his Word, celebrates the sacraments, and responds to his presence in praise has always marked the true church of Christ. The spiritual mystery of his presence was not heightened but lost in the doctrine of transubstantiation, making Christ physically present in the elements, rather than spiritually present among his people. Yet the reality of the spiritual presence of the Lord has also been lost in Protestantism when social crusades, self-improvement lectures, or camaraderie have crowded out worship.

C. The Body of Christ

Many figures are used for the church in the New Testament. It is pictured as a bride, a flock, a vine, a field, a temple. But Paul emphasizes a figure unique to his writing. The church is the body of Christ. In the Hellenistic world of the Apostle it was possible to speak of any organization as a body of people. Our term 'corporation' means just that: a group of people joined as one body by a legal fiction. But Paul speaks of the church, not as a body of people, but as the body of Christ. Evidently he is not simply saying that the church is a Christian corporation. Certainly we should not be surprised to find Paul joining Christ to the figure of the body. Every other figure for the church is related to Christ. If the church is a bride, Christ is the Bridegroom; if the church is a flock, Christ is the Shepherd; if the church is a temple, Christ is the Builder, the Foundation, or the Cornerstone. The figure of the vine makes the union of Christ and the church even more intimate. In the prophecy of Isaiah, God describes Israel as the vine he planted, 'the garden of his delight' (Is. 5:7). Jesus said to his disciples, 'I am the vine; you are the branches' Jn. 15:5). Christians are joined together by being joined to Christ. They are a body because they are Christ's body.

1. Representative Union with Christ

To grasp the force of Paul's figure, we must recognize the extraordinary importance the physical body of Christ his Lord had for him. As Saul the Pharisee, persecuting the church, Paul was confronted on the road to Damascus by the risen Lord. He became a preacher of Christ and the
resurrection (Acts 17:18). In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he strongly opposed the Greek denial of the resurrection of the body. When he wrote to the church at Philippi, he said of Christ that he 'will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body' (Phil. 3:21) – the body he had seen on the Damascus road.

**Christ's Body on the Cross**

But it is not only the risen body of Christ that is important for Paul. Even more frequently he speaks about the crucified body of Christ. In Colossians 1:22 he tells of our 'being reconciled by Christ's physical body through death'. In Romans 7:4 he says that we have 'died to the law through the body of Christ'. As Peter puts it, Christ 'bore our sins in his body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24). Our sins deserve the death penalty, but the penalty was paid by Christ who died in our place. Paul reflects profoundly on the representative union with Christ that causes his death to have a saving outcome for us. So closely does he identify the figurative with the literal body of Christ that it is sometimes difficult to say which he has in view. In Ephesians 2, for example, Paul writes that Christ in his death broke down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, that he might 'reconcile both of them to God through the cross' (Eph. 2:16). Does 'one body' here mean the one body of the church, into which Jews and Gentiles are joined as they are made one new man (v. 15)? Or does 'one body' mean the one body of Christ on the cross by which they are reconciled ('in the blood of Christ', v. 13)? Either interpretation is faithful to Paul's thought. The unity of the church as Christ's body rests on the unity of the body of Christ on the cross. The church is one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5); it is a body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27); it is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12).

**Representation: the Church not a 'Continuing Incarnation'**

This closeness of identification does not mean that Paul is caught in a naive or mystical realism in which he cannot distinguish between the physical body of Christ and the figure of the body applied to the church. Even less does Paul think that Christ died in the body of his flesh, to be raised in the body of the church. Paul does not think of the church as continuing the incarnation. Paul did, after all, see the risen body of the living Lord. He was told, to be sure, that in persecuting the church he was persecuting Christ, but he never imagined that he saw the church on the road to Damascus. On the contrary, nothing is more fundamental for Paul's thought than the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection sealed the finished work of Christ with divine approval;

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19 As against John A. T. Robinson, *The Body* (London 1952), who says, 'It is almost impossible to exaggerate the materialism and crudity of Paul's doctrine of the Church as literally now the resurrection body of Christ' (p. 51).
he was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). But more than that: in both his death and his resurrection, Jesus represented those who are united to him. The identification that Paul sees between Christ and the church is first of all representative.

The Parallel with Adam

The Apostle makes this clear by the parallel that is established between the first and second Adam (Rom. 5:1-21; 1 Cor. 15:22). When Adam sinned, all men sinned in him, and death, the penalty of sin, passed upon all men (Rom. 5:12). Those who are in Christ are related to the Head of the new humanity in the same representative way. When Christ died, they died; when he rose from the dead, they rose with him, and are now in the heavenly places because Christ is there as their great Representative (Rom. 4:25; 6:8, 9; Col. 2:20; 3:1; Eph. 1:3).

Covenantal Headship

The background of Paul's concept of forensic representation is in the covenantal headship of the Old Testament. God makes his covenant with Abraham and with his seed after him (Gen. 12:3; 18:18). God redeems Israel to fulfill the promises he had made to their fathers (Ex. 3:6, 15; Deut. 7:8). The tribes of Israel are blessed in their fathers (Gn. 49). The prophets, priests, and kings that God raises up serve as mediators of God's covenant, representing the people before God, as well as representing God to the people. Israel is called to be God's servant, but Moses also is the servant of the Lord: Israel trusts in the Lord and in his servant Moses (Ex. 14:31). Representative headship is strongly presented in the figure of the suffering Servant in Isaiah. The Servant of the Lord is distinct from Israel, yet can be identified with Israel (Is. 49:3, 5, 6). Because he is the Representative in whom God's covenant is fulfilled, his sufferings are vicarious and redemptive (Is. 53).

It is the concept of covenantal headship that leads Paul to speak of Christ as the Head, and the body as his members. Paul does not think of Christ the Head as constituting only the top member of the body. This is clear from the fact that when Paul speaks of the members of the body he includes ear, eye, and nose (1 Cor. 12:16-21). It is also clear from the fact that Paul uses headship in a way distinct from the body figure. His usage is shaped by the Greek Old Testament, where kephale is associated with arche in translating the Hebrew rosh. Primacy, origination, honor, authority, and summation are signified by headship in the Old Testament. In this sense Paul speaks of the

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husband as the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church. Christ is the Head of every man (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 5:25-32; 1 Cor. 11:3). Christ is the Head of the principalities and powers (Col. 1:22), and has universal dominion as the head of the church (Eph. 1:20-23). Paul thinks of the church as a body in terms of one whole new man in Christ, or, alternatively, as the bride of Christ, springing from him as Eve was taken from the body of Adam, and united to him as a wife to her husband (Eph. 1:15; 5:23-32). We would distort Paul's figure beyond recognition were we to speak of Christ as a head, helpless without a body. The body of Christ is not to be divided at the neck! Even when the two figures are put side by side, as in Ephesians 4:15,16, the distinction remains. We are not to suppose that Paul is imagining a strange physiology by which the body grows up into the head and is nourished by it.

2. Vital Union

When Paul speaks of our union with Christ, representative union is always in view. Because Christ died, we died. Our death in Christ has paid the penalty of sin and freed us from the chains of sin. Because Christ rose, we rose, and we now enjoy the freedom of new life in Christ. But while this representative relation is always in view, Paul's understanding of our union with Christ is richer than forensic relation.

Paul's Phrase 'In Christ'

This is apparent from Paul's use of the phrase 'in Christ'. On the one hand, Paul speaks of our being 'in Christ' representatively. When Paul writes, 'Therefore, there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 8:1), he is referring to the representative relation that he has been expounding. 'In Christ' also refers to the representative status of believers in passages that speak of God's saving action or gift to us in Christ (e.g. Eph. 1:3, 6, 11; 2:13, 14; 4:32; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:19, 21). This is true also of passages that use 'in Christ' to designate believers as they sustain a saving relation to Christ (e.g. Phil. 1:14; 3:9; 4:21; Rom. 16:7, 11; 1 Cor. 1:30). But in other passages the phrase carries a fuller meaning. Paul speaks of 'the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thes. 1:1).

Unless Paul meant more than simply a representative union with Christ, he could not have joined the Father to Christ in the same phrase. Because we are united to Christ, we are not only in Christ representatively, but also vitally. Christ is in us by the presence of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:10, 11). The resurrection life of Christ is not only reckoned to our account, it is a living power transforming our existence. We grow up into Christ (Eph. 4:12-16; Col. 2:6, 7), being conformed to his image (Rom. 8:29). Christ gave his body once for all on the cross; in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we remember his sacrifice. As we commune with him in the sacrament, however, we also feed upon him spiritually by faith,
and our living fellowship with him is sustained (1 Cor. 11:24-29; cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

This vital union 'in Christ' is mystical in the sense that it far surpasses the relation possible between finite persons, yet it is not an impersonal mysticism. We are not immersed in Christ as in the air that we breathe. We misunderstand Paul's language if we think of our vital union with Christ in spatial terms. Yet Paul does use the language of the temple to describe Christ's dwelling with (in) us, and moves easily to the figure of our dwelling in him as the other side of the personal communion that his indwelling represents (Col. 1:27, 28; 2:9f.).

Fellowship in Union with Christ

Paul's concept of the body of Christ is drawn from his doctrine of our union with Christ. For that reason the fellowship of the body is a sharing together in fellowship with Christ. The fundamental idea expressed in koinonia is not the link that joins Christians to each other, but the common bond that unites them to Christ.

At the same time, union with Christ does bind Christians together by the ties of the Spirit. By our union with Christ, we are united to each other. The image of the body is a happy one for this purpose, since it presents a unity that is organic. An organism manifests unity in diversity, and Paul makes powerful use of this metaphor. As an organism, the church is one body. When party strife threatened to divide the church at Corinth under the names of ministers of the gospel who had laboured there, Paul cried out in anguish of heart, 'Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?' (1 Cor. 1:13). The church of Christ cannot be divided by following human leaders, for the church is one: one in Christ's body on the cross. That oneness is symbolized at the Lord's Table: 'We, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1 Cor. 10:17).

Making Church Unity Evident

The unity of the body of Christ is to be evident on earth. To declare oneself to be a follower of Apollos rather than Paul, or of Paul rather than Peter, is to deny the unity of the body. The lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance in love that are the fruits of the Spirit enable us to keep the unity

21 Friedrich Büchsel declares, 'The deepest ground for the fact that we may not represent being-in-Christ in a spatial or quasi-spatial way is that Christ always is and remains the Lord, the Judge, for Paul' ("In Christus" bei Paulus', ZNW 42 [1949] 154). Büchsel and others protest the concept of Pauline mysticism described by Adolf Deissmann, Die neutestamentliche Formel 'in Christo Jesu' (Marburg 1892).
22 Friedrich Hauck, 'Koinonos' etc., TDNT 4,797-8°9.
of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). The mere fact that the church has been divided denominationally does not justify such division. A flat denial that division exists will not help; neither is it a solution to start with a clean slate, as it were, and to create yet another division in the church by establishing a group that will not be followers of Peter, Paul or Apollos, but simply of Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). Another expedient is to declare one denomination to be the true church of Christ, and all others apostate or schismatic. Such efforts have succeeded only in creating further division, yet they begin from a proper premise. They rightly assume that the church should be one, not just in heaven, but on earth. When the unity that we are zealously to maintain has been broken, we cannot ignore the calamity, but must set about seeking to restore the broken fellowship. We cannot ignore deep and serious doctrinal differences. Neither can we ignore false teaching, and unite a church that is indifferent to creed, or even committed to denying the need for doctrinal discipline. The path to restoring unity requires discipline along with patient instruction and loving admonition. We are not without direction on this path. The writings of the New Testament provide us with an inspired model of how unity in the Spirit is to be sought.

3. Individual and Corporate Unity with Christ

The model of the body assumes that our relation to Christ is both individual and corporate. If the individual relationship did not exist, the differing gifts that make up the body would not appear. The individual saints are chosen and called of God. They have been saved by faith, and their faith stands in the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5). Salvation is an individual experience: 'The man who loves God is known by God' (1 Cor. 8:3). The same affirmations that are made about the church as the body of Christ are also made about the individual Christian. He, too, is a holy temple (1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 5:1); that temple may be defiled by one member (1 Cor. 6:15). The Christian is joined to Christ, as is the church (1 Cor. 6:15; Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:28; Eph. 5:22-23; 2 Cor. 11:2).

On the other hand, just as there is no salvation apart from Christ, so there is no salvation that does not join us to one another as members of his body. The sanctified in Christ Jesus at Corinth make up the church of God at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). Divisions among the saints imply that Christ can be divided (1 Cor. 1:3). There is one Christ; apostles and teachers are his servants, called by him and endued with gifts of his Spirit (1 Cor. 3:5). There is one church – Christ's church; apostles and teachers are given to the church as stewards of Christ (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

If the church may not be divided by the diversity of its leaders, neither may it be divided by the diverse gifts of its members. The organic figure of the body shows that diversity does not produce division, but unity. Not only do the gifts proceed from one Giver; they are also interdependent. The interdependence applies to both the ministry of the gifts of the Spirit and the benefit from such
ministry. If a church had only teachers, the absence of ministries of order and mercy would soon destroy the one-sided fellowship. The body is not composed entirely of the tongue. All ministry in the body is therefore team ministry. We serve together as we minister to one another.

On the other hand, those who receive the ministry of others depend upon the gifts of others for their growth. Growth in Christ must take place in the church of Christ, for it is in the body of Christ that the nurturing gifts are exercised. Christian life 'in Christ' is in the body of Christ. Indeed, the steward of Christ's gifts grows through exercising his stewardship just as the recipient of his ministry grows through receiving it. To deny to a brother or sister the ministry of grace given to one is to be an unfaithful steward of the manifold mercies of God (1 Pet. 4:10). In such ministry, pride cannot say that it has no need of the humblest of ministries, nor can envy refuse to perform the lowliest of tasks (1 Cor. 12:4-31).

Bibliography


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