

AND HE IS THE HEAD

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INTRODUCTION

Good evening, Grace. I'm absolutely convinced that I need this seminar—that we all need this seminar. We need to hear what God's Word says about how we, collectively, relate to Jesus and how we relate to one another as the people of God. I'm very thankful for Grace Church and the work that God has done in us to bring us to where we are. I've been absolutely blown away by the generosity and love and support of all of you for all of you. However, I'm also absolutely convinced that there is work left to be done and depths of God that we have yet to discover—work and depths that are only accessible in the context of this community. We can't get there on our own, we must go together.

That's what this seminar is meant to be. It's meant to help us go together to the places that God has reserved for the Church.

As I've grown as a Christ follower my recognition of my need for the people of God has dramatically increased. Early on in my Christian life (naively and pridefully) I felt little need for the Church. I suppose this individualism had its roots in two main sins: 1) a tiny view of God's kingdom and the work he means to accomplish in it; and 2) the faithless worldview that I grew up with before trusting in Jesus.

Today, however, because God has matured me as a Christian and because I've lived quite a bit more life, I'm all too aware of my need for God's people. I lack gifts which I need and God promises to provide through his people. I lack resources which I need and God promises to provide through his people. I lack knowledge which I need and God promises to provide through his people. I lack love and faith and obedience and examples which I need and God promises to provide through his people. God, in his Word, promises to meet certain needs of his people only through his people. I now know this with my mind and have experienced it in my life.

In the past several years I've been through times of remarkable joy and difficulty in the context of the Church. I've experienced God's people caring for my family and others in selfless and sacrificial ways. It's been awesome to experience the presence of God through the people of God. However, once again, I'm convinced that God, in his Word, holds out even greater promises for the Church. In this seminar we'll look at the doctrine of the Church (what the bible has to say about the church), scheme together how we might live out the reality that we are all a part of as members of the body of Christ, and hope and dream together about what God might do as we live collective lives of faith!

THE BODY OF CHRIST

So here we are...at a seminar on the body of Christ. Let's start at the beginning. What is the body of Christ?

The phrase "body of Christ" is a metaphor used by the apostle Paul in ten different passages in the NT (in various forms) which is used to communicate a truth that is spoken of and assumed throughout the entire bible.

Let's start by taking a quick look at each of Paul's ten uses of this phrase. Each table will take one of the passages, read it together, and make some observations about what it says about the body of Christ. As you read over the verses, ask yourself a few questions:

1. What is Paul's understanding of the body of Christ according to this passage?
2. What are the implications for the body of Christ in this passage?
3. How is the body of Christ described in this passage?
4. What is the relationship between Jesus and the body of Christ in this passage?

Romans 12:3-5 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and all were made to drink of one Spirit... ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 3:4-6 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Ephesians 4:4-6, 11-16 There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all... ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up 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 mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 5:22-23, 29-30 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

Colossians 1:18, 24-26 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent... ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Colossians 2:18-19 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Colossians 3:11, 15 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all... ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Big picture wise, as you can see, Paul uses the phrase “body” or “body of Christ” synonymously with “Church”. So what is the body of Christ or Church, then? Simply, for Paul, both terms refer to “the community of all true believers [Christians] of all time” (Grudem). The body of Christ or Church is all Christians everywhere and always.

Paul's use of the phrase “body of Christ” has two important nuances, however, that I'd like to briefly mention. First, even though he understands the “body of Christ” to refer to the universal church in its most basic sense, in these passages, he has a particular view to local congregations.

Second, in most of these passages Paul assumes that his readers understand what the body of Christ is and so he spends most of his time drawing their attention to a particular implication or set of implications of it. In other words, in speaking to local congregations (with the universal Church in mind) Paul spends less time defining what he means by “body of Christ” and more time talking about how Christians should live because they are a part of it.

With these passages of Scripture and these qualifications in mind, our aim is to come to understand and live out the reality that we, as Christians, form the body of Christ. We want to be clear on what the body of Christ is and what it looks like in a healthy state.

So, here's a statement that's going to drive the rest of our time together:

A healthy body of Christ submits to Christ as its head, recognizes that it is one body with many members, functions with individual members using their individual gifts for the common good, experiences God's promised grace, enjoys true fellowship, and results in an outward focus.

This definition of health flows from the conviction that Paul's use of the phrase *body of Christ*, always has in mind the nature and implications of two relationships: 1) the relationship between Jesus and Christians; and 2) the relationship among Christians and the fact that both are a gift from God through the Spirit.

We'll spend the rest of this session looking at what Paul's use of the phrase “body of Christ” says about the nature of the relationship between Christ and Christians. Then, for the rest of the seminar we'll look at what it says about the nature of the relationship among Christians.

AND HE IS THE HEAD

A proper understanding of the body of Christ and our role in it begins with the realization that Jesus Christ is the head of the body of Christ. This is made clear in several passages.

Ephesians 1:22-23 *And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

Ephesians 4:15-16 *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Ephesians 5:23 *For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*

Colossians 1:17-20 *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Colossians 2:18-19 *Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.*

The fact of the matter is, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church, His body. But what does this mean? That is, what is the nature of his headship, how does he become our head, and how does his headship effect our lives together?

THE NATURE OF HIS HEADSHIP

Jesus is the head of the Church in at least three senses. We can see each of them in Colossians 1:16-20.

Colossians 1:16-22 *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...*

Oh man, before we get into the neatly laid out three points of Jesus' headship, stop and worship. We form a body and this Jesus is our head, the one in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, the one in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, the one who is now seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come, the one who at the mention of his name every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

This Jesus is our head. None of this seminar will make sense if we don't get this and stand amazed because of it. Stop now and pray. Ask God to make you awake to this divine reality.

Jesus is the head of the body.

1. He is the creator and Lord of the universe. There is nothing that he is not head over!

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell...

Jesus is the head of the church in a general way in that he is head over everything.

2. He is the one who gives direction and example to the people of God.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

Jesus is the head of the church in that he provides the church with direction and example. He is the one who determines the actions and attitudes of the Church. He is the one who provided the example of how to live. He is the one who showed us what righteousness and sacrifice and loving-kindness means and what it means to be a servant and how to be great and how to live well in community.

3. He is the firstborn among many brothers.

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

And Jesus is also head over the church in that he was the first to be raised from the dead. This firstness gives him preeminence and headship.

There can be no understanding of us as a body of Christ without a right understanding of the headship of Christ.

THE ORIGIN OF HIS HEADSHIP

How did/does Jesus become our head? This might seem like a silly question at first. But it's one that we need to be clear on because it has dramatic implications for our body life.

In the first case (Jesus is the head of the church in a general way in that he is head over everything) Jesus became our head by creating us.

In the second case (He is the one who gives direction and example to the people of God) he did so by becoming a man and living a sinless life.

"When God's Son took on flesh, he truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves. This was the eternal counsel of the triune God. Now we are in him. Where he is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the Cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him. That is why the Scriptures call us the Body of Christ" (Bonhoeffer).

In the third case (He is the firstborn among many brothers), and the one which Paul seems to have primarily in mind in the passages that reference the body of Christ, Jesus did so by dying on a cross. If there is no cross there is not body of Christ.

Colossians 1:17-20 *And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

The main point here is that the body of Christ was formed because of what our head did for us. The fact that the headship of Jesus was secured and accomplished apart from anything in us means that our bodyship has its origins in something immovable. We are the body of Christ not because we deserve it or because we worked hard enough for it or even because we were looking for it, but because Jesus created the universe out of his community with the Father and Spirit, came to earth to demonstrate community in the flesh, and then died on a cross to ransom us back from enmity into community with God and each other.

THE EFFECT OF HIS HEADSHIP

I just mentioned a truly awesome effect of Christ's headship on us as the body. There are three more that I want to close by mentioning.

1. Our agenda dies. As Pastor Daniel told us last Sunday, because Jesus is our head our agenda ends. Or, in other words, our new agenda becomes Christ's agenda. We do not get to bring anything with us through grace. It must all die on the alter or repentance. This is another one of those points where none of the rest of this seminar will make sense, or at least none of it will be particularly compelling, if we do not begin with the fact that Jesus' headship ends our agenda.

Matthew 16:24-26 *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?"*

It is Jesus, as head, who determines the direction and purpose and power of the body.

2. Our pride dies. The second direct effect of Jesus headship on the body of Christ is that it leaves no room for pride. If we are to boast it will be in our head.

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 *He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

If ever there was a head worth boasting over it's Jesus, but this is where our boasting ends.

3. The body of Christ will succeed. In his resurrection from the dead Jesus secured victory over death and the kingdom of God. Because Jesus, our head, has won we who are in him by grace through faith are also assured of eternal victory.

1 Peter 1:3-5 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

There will be times of trial and difficulty within the body of Christ. However all trials are to be pure joy in light of the promised eternal victory won by our head, Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The main point in all of this is that we can't have a proper understanding of how we are to relate to one another as Christians if we do not have a proper understanding of how we relate to God. Jesus Christ is the head of all, especially those who trust in him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the verses from the beginning most stood out to you and why?
2. What did you think of Pastor Dave's definition of a healthy body of Christ? Did anything in particular catch your attention? Which part would you like to know more about? Which aspect of this definition would you like to see practiced more appropriately?
3. How does the fact that Jesus is the head of the body make you feel?
4. Which aspect of Jesus' headship stands out to you and why?
5. Can you see how the origin of Jesus headship is significant for how we are to relate to him and to one another within the body?
6. Which of the three effects of Jesus' headship listed by Pastor Dave did you most need to hear and why?
7. What is one way that you need to change your behavior in light of what we discussed here?