

# The Body of Christ: Separating Myth from Metaphor

## Chapter VI

### Summary and Conclusion

The Church is "the body of Christ." The nature of this Pauline metaphor has been the subject of this book. The main point that has been developed is that this metaphor teaches the functional relationship of Christ to each and every assembly of which He is head. This metaphor neither teaches an organic union of the individual believer to Christ nor the organic union to Christ of any group of believers. Rather, it pictures Christ's relationship to His assembly as a husband nourishes his relationship to his wife although they are not organically one being but two becoming one in function, unity, goal and purpose. In the same way, each church is not organically one in being with a supposed mystical body of Christ but two, Christ and His assembly becoming one by a process of sanctification. Through His functional Headship relationship He cares for and enriches the church so that there is unity, oneness of goal and purpose between Himself and His assembly. It is called His body because it is His by possession, creation, and relationship. The church manifests the gifts of Christ as He possessed them in His body while upon this earth. Therefore the corporate organized unity of His gifts is the essence of the church.

One may question, if the view proposed in this book is true, why doesn't the New Testament speak of the **bodies** of Christ instead of

consistently referring to the **body** of Christ? If each church is a **body** of Christ then why is there no reference to the **bodies** of Christ. The answer is found in realizing that the word church (ἐκκλησία) is never used in the New Testament in a metaphorical sense. Every time Jesus used the word church or churches in Matthew and the book of Revelation it is used in its ordinary sense. The Apostle Paul does not alter Christ's usage of (ἐκκλησία).<sup>35</sup> Its usage is always in either a concrete or generic sense in every passage. Therefore there is no possibility of conveying the wrong meaning of (ἐκκλησία) by using it in the plural—churches. On the other hand body in the Pauline ecclesiology is used in a metaphorical sense i.e. Christ's gifts organized in an assembly is analogous to the diversity of the several parts of a human body which exist in the perfect unity of the whole body. To speak of the **bodies** of Christ would confuse the metaphor. The fact that there is a consistent use of the word body in the singular in reference to the church neither establishes nor necessitates the existence of an universal invisible body of Christ. It establishes a careful use of the word so that there is no idea developed that would infer that there can be more than **one kind** of body of Christ.

There is one people of God, one kingdom of God, one fold of the sheep of God. Becoming a child of God, entering the kingdom and entering the fold of God all picture the believer as entering into the salvation of God. One entering into the body of Christ is not picturing entering into salvation but a

relationship of sanctification. Hence, there is no conflict with there being many individual churches and each metaphorically a body of Christ because each body is not a picture of division in Christ. Rather this places the one people of God into corporate relationship with Christ. Remember there is a difference between being placed in Christ and the action of God subsequent to salvation placing us into a body which is Christ's. Hence, it is not that Christ has many bodies, but He has one place in which the people of God can experience a corporate sanctifying oneness to each other.

One might ask why there cannot be one invisible body if there can be one unseen fold or kingdom. The reason is that the body metaphor does not depict salvation, it depicts sanctification. When one is placed in the kingdom or fold of God, he is saved. He is entering the "in Christ" reality of salvation. A believer is not saved by being placed into the body of Christ; he is sanctified unto God corporately with other believers. All will experience the blessing of corporate unity and full sanctification in glory, but presently only those who submit themselves to God's action of placing themselves into an assembly experience the progressive sanctification this corporate relationship brings. Such sanctification does not create division in Christ, but rather it creates Christ-likeness in a way that cannot be accomplished by the believer in isolation, and which presently brings glory to God and will have an eternal weight of glory in heaven.

The teaching of our union with Jesus Christ should be guarded

tenaciously. Refuting a metaphor that weakens the teaching of this truth has been one of the purposes of this book. We are one in Christ as we formerly were in Adam. Yet, being in Adam is not pictured as the sinner being a member of one universal invisible flesh. We are the branches of Jesus as the vine. We are the branches of His salvational fullness as the grafted branches of an olive tree. Our spirit is one spirit with Christ's Spirit as He indwells the believer, but we are not one member in a mystical body because such a metaphor is not taught in regard to our union with Jesus Christ. In such a metaphor Christ would be a subordinate part of His own body. Our salvation would not just come from the head but also from the other vital members of the body. We could boast that we bear the head. Those of Paul's day would not have understood the metaphor in this way because according to their thinking the life of the body is in the blood not the head. They did not understand the brain as the central nervous system but rather the heart and belly region as the region of the mind<sup>36</sup> When the Bible refers to the body of Christ it does not mean the mystical body of which He is the organic Head, but rather the metaphorical body of Christ that is His by possession, creation, relationship, and Lordship. It is built on the qualities of an ordinary human body, and then applied to the assembly of Christ as depicting His many and various spiritual gifts existing in a particular locale in unity and visible corporate manifestation.

<sup>35</sup> Carroll, B.H., *ECCLÉSIA (The Church,)*

<sup>36</sup> The Greek for "heart" as used in Matt. 15: 18, "mind" as used in Phil. 2: 2, and "belly" as used in John 7: 38 are defined respectively by Zodhiates. **heart-**"in the NT, used only figuratively **(I)** as the seat of the desires feelings, affections, passions, impulses, i.e. the heart or mind **(II)** As the seat of the intellect meaning the mind, understanding" **mind-**"Contracted. ..from (5424)." (5424) is defined "Literally the diaphragm, that which curls or restrains. Figuratively, the supposed seat of all mental and emotional activity. Belly-"...It also means the inward part, the inner man, similar to the breast, the heart as we speak of it in Eng."

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