

A METAPHOR OF THE MYSTERY

THE BODY OF CHRIST

By: William B. Hallman

Ephesians 1:23:

“Which is His Body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”

Ephesians 2:16:

“And that he might reconcile both unto God in One Body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.”

Ephesians 4:4:

“There is One Body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.”

Ephesians 4:12:

“For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of The Body of Christ.”

Ephesians 4:16:

“From whom The Whole Body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase of The Body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Ephesians 5:23:

“For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of The Body.”

Ephesians 5:30:

“For we are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bones.”

The Holy Spirit of God has given to us truth, as found in the Scriptures, in various forms of expression, called “Figures of Speech”. A “Figure of Speech” departs from the plain and normal expression of truth to one in which figurative language is used. Such figures as allegory, metaphor, simile, and hyperbole or exaggeration are among the manifold varieties of figures used. In the texts quoted from the Book of Ephesians, and also elsewhere in the New Testament, we have the Church set forth in the figure of a metaphor as seen in the use of the word “Body”. A metaphor, by way of definition, is a figure of speech in which one thing represents another. In a simile one thing resembles another, in which the words “like” and “as” are used to show the figure.

One of the richest studies one can make is a study of Paul’s “Metaphors of the Mystery”. He uses several of them to present truth relative to the Church of the present dispensation, such as: “One New Man”, “A Colony in Heaven” and “A Temple of God”.

We note from our Scriptures in Ephesians and elsewhere in Paul's Epistles, that the Church is designated by this figure as: "The Body", "His Body", "One Body", "Whole Body", "The Body of Christ", and "The Same Body". The word translated "Body" is the Greek word "soma". It occurs some 147 times, and is translated "body" in all passages except two – Rev. 18:13 it is "slave" and 2 Cor. 10:10 it is "bodily".

In the majority of cases the word "soma" refers to the actual physical body as seen in Matt. 5:29; 26:12, but also to the spirit body given at resurrection as seen in 1 Cor. 15:35,37,44. The word is also used in First Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians of a believing company called "The Church". Once in Scripture the joint-word "sussoma" occurs (Eph. 3:6). This comes in the great classic passage revealing the "mystery ... that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel".

The structural form of the eight references to the "body" in Ephesians may be set forth as follows:

- A-1. His Body – Exaltation 1:23
- B-1. One Body – Reconciliation 2:16
- C-1. One Body – Unification 4:4
 - D-1. The Body – Edification 4:12
- C-2. The Body – Unification 4:16a
 - D-2. The Body – Edification 4:16b
- B-2. The Body – Reconciliation 5:23
- A-2. His Body – Exaltation 5:30

There are two spiritual groups in the New Testament which, by many, are considered one the same, namely those spoken of as "the Bride, the Lamb's wife"; (There is no such expression as "The Bride of Christ" found in the N.T.) and those designated as "His Body". A careful study of the passages involved in both expressions will reveal that they must represent two distinct companies of believers. The word "bride" occurs but five times in the N.T. and never in Paul's Epistles. They are John 3:29; Rev. 18:23; 21:2,9; 22:17. These passages certainly do not refer to "the Body of Christ" or the Church of this dispensation.

In two places Paul does refer to the marriage state to present truth related to spiritual relationship (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:30-33). But in neither instance is his purpose to set forth the bride and bridegroom idea. In the first (2 Cor. 11:2) he is setting forth the idea of chastity or purity in the Christian relationship to Christ, and in the latter (Eph. 5:30-33) he is setting forth the oneness, or unity that comes about when we are joined to Christ. The contexts in either case definitely rule out any idea of the bridal aspect. How important it is to read and interpret every passage in the light of its context. What errors we would avoid if we were more careful in our Bible reading – to note exactly what the writer has said and what his point of view is.

The following outlines may help us to see the distinctions between the Bridal and the Body companies:

- I. The Body (Eph. 2:20-22)
 - 1. A Holy Temple
 - 2. Its Foundation: "the Apostles and Prophets" of the Mystery.
 - 3. "Jesus Christ, The Chief Cornerstone."

II. The Bride (Rev. 21:9-27)

1. A Holy City
2. Its Foundation: “the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.”
3. “The Lamb” – The Temple of it and the Light thereof.

In several of our Scripture passages the definite article is used to designate this “Body”. The words “*toú somatos*” or “The Body” is used to designate the Church. This indicates that it is a definite Body, a Body that God chose before the overthrow of the world (Eph. 1:4; 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:9).

Before coming to an exposition and interpretation of our subject we wish to point out another very important detail of our theme, namely that it is a Body definitely connected with resurrection, our Lord’s resurrection. We see from our Scriptures that eight (8) times in Ephesians the word “body” occurs as designating the Church. Its last occurrence is most significant (5:30), “For we are members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones”. It is the omission here that is significant. You will notice that blood is eliminated from the composition of His body. In the resurrection Christ had a body of flesh and bone, but no blood. He was no longer animated by the soulical principle, but by spirit principle; hence blood was eliminated. This is the body to which we are now related as believers in this Dispensation. Our identification in all the work of Christ brings us to resurrection ground, yea, we are also seated with Him in glory (Eph. 2:6).

We want to approach our subject from three aspects:

- Its Composition
- Its Continuity
- Its Completeness.

COMPOSITION OF ITS FORM

The Figure of Speech which the Apostle uses here is that of a “Body” as we have seen. The Psalmist says concerning our material bodies: “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well (Psa. 139:14). These physical bodies of ours, when they function properly are mechanisms of great wonder. What they can endure and accomplish are often-times beyond human imagination. But if these physical bodies are so wonderful, what shall we say of this spiritual body? Throughout all ages to come we shall stand in awe and wonder at the miracle of what God has done for us in Christ our Lord.

The Church which is given to us in the figure of “Body” is designated as “His Body” or Identification; “One Body” or Unification; “Whole Body” or Incorporation; “The Body” or Specification; “Like Body” or Association; and “Joint-Body” or Assimilation.

This Body is first of all a Mystery Body. “For we are members of his body, of His flesh, and of His bones ... This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:30,32). The Greek word “*musterion*” translated “mystery” cannot mean allegory or dark saying, but does mean something once hidden and now revealed. So that this Body is a great revelation. The Apostle had already said: “How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery (or secret) ... Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men” (Eph. 3:3,5).

The great revelation now set forth in this sacred secret is that spoken by the Apostle in Ephesians 3:6: “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.” This secret was never made known in any age before Paul received it by special revelation. It had been revealed that Gentiles would be blessed with Israel, through Jesus Christ (Rom 15:8-12). But never that both would be united into “One Body by the Cross” (Eph. 2:16).

Again, we find that it is spoken of as a Male Body. “For to make in himself of twain ONE NEW MAN, so making peace” (Eph. 2:15). “We are members of HIS BODY, of HIS FLESH, and of HIS BONES” (Eph. 5:30). This union of Christ and the Church is an organic male union; a living organism, not an organization. So this new body is characterized by the male sex.

Some will point out that the word “church” (Gk. Ekklesia) is a feminine word in the original, and therefore the Church can be spoken of in the female gender, and we should use the pronouns “she” and “her” when speaking of this Body. However, this only reveals ignorance of the original language. Gender in Greek grammar is not the same as sex. Modern English has few traces of grammatical gender but Greek nouns all have gender, masculine, feminine or neuter. The Greek word for head is kephale, and is a feminine noun. Does this mean that Christ as the “Head” of the Body is a female, or of the feminine sex? Of course it does not. The Church which is His Body is in no sense spoken of in the feminine sex. We have shown in our introduction that this Church cannot be “The Bride of the Lamb”.

The Apostle goes back before the Fall and takes an illustration of man’s creation when speaking of Christ and the Church as joined together in one Body (Eph. 5:31 with Gen. 2:21-24). Let us look at the ancient record of Eve’s creation. It tells us that God put Adam into a deep sleep, and while he slept, took a rib from him and made a woman. The word translated “the rib” is in Hebrew – Hazzela and means literally “the side chamber”. Adam then called her “Isha” or “taken out of man”. In English we have the word “woman” or “womb-man”. From this it is evident that Adam in his original creation, before Eve was taken from him, was a bi-sexual individual. This bi-sexual Adam was evidently God’s original ideal. God had said, after Eve’s creation from Adam, that they both should be “one flesh”. Paul then picks up this fact and shows that that is exactly what God is doing in Christ, making “one new MAN”.

So God is in the Church which is Christ’s Body, forming a new male body. This is both the first and the highest in God’s spiritual creation as it was in His physical creation.

In the composition of this Body we find that it is also a Miracle Body. “For to make in Himself of twain one new man” (Eph. 2:15). Paul says that “the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”. He also says: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

When we emphasize the distinctive character of the Church which is His Body from all the previous revelation in Scripture, some counter with Eph. 3:5 and give great emphasis to the word “now” in that verse, “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed”. But all the other contexts show that this Body was a brand new one. It was not something old that was remade. As once we were found in the first Adam; so now we are in the Last Adam. As once we had all our life in this body of flesh, bone, and blood; so now we have

residence also in a Body of flesh and bone – the spirit body of Jesus Christ, living in glory at God’s right hand.

The miracle is that we are now a new creation in Christ. It took a miracle to take us out of the first Adam, a state of condemnation and separation, and to place us in Christ, the last Adam and federal Head of this new creation. Yes, “it took a miracle of love and grace”!

Finally, in the composition of this body we find that it is a Mutual Body. “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond or free; but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). What a beautiful and blessed thought and fact it is that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

If this is a mutual body, then it means that it is a denationalized body, a denominationalized body, a decreedalized body, a desocialized body, and a deracialized body.

When one enters into this perfect Church, the Body of Christ, it settles every problem. Every spiritual problem is taken care of for we “are complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). And there can be no real social, racial, educational, or even political problem for the one who is a member of Christ’s Body.

CONTINUITY OF ITS FUNCTION

“From Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16).

Each member of the Body has been joined to Christ Who is the Head of the Body. Therefore we are all one in Christ and no one can think of himself more highly than he ought to think. There are no degrees of stature in this body, but it is likened unto a temple: “In Whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord”.

Because the Body is joined to the Head which is Christ every member brings the love of Christ into the unit. This provides a unity of purpose. The central passage in the New Testament relative to the unity of the body is set forth in Ephesians 4:1-6. “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Vr. 3). Paul here insists upon the fact of this unity. There is no word appealing to us to restore the unity; no word asking us to guard the unity. There is no suggestion of defense in the word Paul uses here. It could better be translated: “Endeavoring to keep in view the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” to observe, to see, to recognize, and to act in harmony with this recognition and the vision.

As humans it is difficult to realize the exalted position that the Body of Christ has in this dispensation. But let’s let the words in Eph. 1:18-23 explain it to us: “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. Which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places. Far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world (age) but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, Which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”

COMPLETENESS OF ITS FAITH

“For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:9-10).

This completeness in Christ is made possible by His Glorious Grace. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). It is the Grace of God that saves us, and gives us a complete justification. The Grace of God is adequate for every circumstance in our lives as believers. No “thorn in the flesh” can ever overwhelm us if we know His matchless grace in all its sustaining power. His glorious grace will ever bring to us the riches of Heaven’s grace. “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ” (Eph. 2:7).

Sing of the grace that has saved us,
children of wrath as we were;
Walking as bond-slaves of Satan,
prince of the power of the air.
But God, rich in mercy,
loved us when dead in our sin.
Made us alive in our Savior,
planting His Spirit within.

Sing of the grace that exceedeth,
from glory to glory we’ll grow,
When in the yet future ages,
His kindness to us He will show.
To Him be the glory,
boasting in self cannot be,
Walking and working to please Him,
saved for His glory are we.

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This completeness is further seen in His Perfect Peace. “And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Every member of the Body of Christ has peace with God, and can know the peace of God. And our glad anticipation is that someday we shall have the very God of peace Himself. The peace of God within drives out all fear, and becomes the peace of God without that conquers every foe, every obstacle in our way.

There is also for us His Profound Power. “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:19). “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph. 3:20). “I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). What a power is at our disposal! Power to do His will, the power of His protection, the strength of Christ for all that we do.

Our completeness will also be consummated in the Greatest Glory. Members of His body who have died will participate in a secret prior resurrection. The Apostle says: "If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Phil. 3:11). It is literally an "out-resurrection from among the dead". This resurrection precedes what is known as "The first resurrection". Those who are alive will participate in a secret rapture. "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high (upward) calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Christ will come to take us home without any earthly sights, sounds, or seraphic manifestations. Our completeness in Christ will be consummated in a sublime reception. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:4). "That He might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). What a glorious reception it will be when all the ransomed of this dispensation will be united with its Head "far above all".

The great truth concerning "the church which is His Body" which is the great theme of the Pauline post Acts epistles, is the most vital truth for believers in the present era of Sovereign Grace.

Joined to Christ in mystic union,
We Thy members, Thou our Head,
Sealed by deep and true communion;
Savior, we would humbly claim,
All the power of this Thy name.

Instant sympathy to brighten
All their weakness and their woe,
Guiding grace their way to lighten,
Shall Thy loving members know;
All their sorrows Thou dost bear,
All Thy gladness they shall share.

Make Thy members every hour,
For Thy blessed service meet;
Ernest tongues, and arms of power,
Skilful hands, and hastening feet,
Ever ready to fulfill
All Thy word, and all Thy will.

Everlasting life thou givest,
Everlasting love to see;
They shall live because Thou livest,
And their life is hid with Thee,
Safe Thy members shall be found,
When their glorious Head is crowned.

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