

The Body of Christ in Colossians

Intro: A junior higher's thoughts on church and my own inclination...

Context of Colossians:

- The great emphasis of Paul's letter to the Colossians is that Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation, whether visible or invisible (Col. 1:15-20).
- This remains true despite a segment of creation violently rebelling against her Creator (Col. 1:21; 2:13; 3:5-11).
- Yet in the midst of a rebellious creation, those in Christ have already been rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin (Col. 1:13-14, 18-20).
- Paul employs this teaching on the lordship of Jesus Christ in order to warn the Colossian church against tampering with a legalistic, mystical spirituality that he calls "an empty, deceitful philosophy" (Col. 2:8). There is no need to meddle with mere shadows of the spiritual world when the reality of Jesus Christ has appeared (Col 2:17).
- The Colossians could only embrace legalism and mysticism if they let their grip on Christ loosen (Col 2:19) and it appears that Paul believed this would eventually result in divisions within the church (3:5-17). It is in this context that Paul compares the church to a body and Christ to the body's head.

If We Cling to Christ, We Grow in the Body

Theology of the Body of Christ – The moment one believes in Christ he or she has been baptized in the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). In 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:3-8, Paul emphasizes the unity of the Body in the midst of the diversity of the members. In Ephesians 4 and Colossians, Paul adds a new element to the metaphor of the Body, explaining that Christ is the Head.

I. *Christ is the Head, We are the Body*: Christ is the Authority and Sustainer of each member of the Body that simultaneously holds onto Christ, the Head, and remains connected to other believers.

A. Christ is the Head (Colossians 1:18; 2:19)

1. Colossians 1:18 **"He is the head of the body, the church"** emphasizes that He is the Lord/Authority/Ruler over the Church. Christ is organically connected to the Body and, yet, he is in authority over it. He sets the agenda, allocates resources, and prescribes our manner of life.

a. Christ's relationship to the church is contrasted to Christ's relationship to all creation. By virtue of being the Creator, Christ is **"before all things and all things are held together in him"** (1:17), i.e., Christ is the authority and sustainer of all creation.

b. Christ is the authority and sustainer of all creation and the authority and sustainer of the Church. *So what is the difference?* The Church is at peace with God (1:20) and grows into maturity (2:19; Eph 4:16) while the rebellious world heads into God's wrath (3:6).

2. Colossians 2:19 Christ is **“the head from whom the whole body, supported and knit together through its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.”**

a. In the 1st century world, the head was not just viewed as the authority, but also the source of nutrition. So the metaphor illustrates that Christ is the sole source of genuine godly growth (O'Brien, 50).

b. The great danger of the legalism and mystical spiritualism the Colossians were tampering with (Col 2:8-19) was that they would lose their grip on Christ, the Head, and therefore lose connection with the true source of godly growth.

B. The Church is the Body (Colossians 2:19, 3:15)

1. The Body Grows Together -- The emphasis of Colossians is that spiritual sustenance comes only from Christ. Yet, though He is ultimately the only source, it remains true that the Body is supplied and held together by the “ligaments and sinews” (Cf Eph. 4:15-16). *Christ is the source, but the Body is the conduit He chooses to use.*

2. Relationship is what binds the Body together and allows the growth from God to flow through. Paul says in 3:15 to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts. The “peace” here is not so much *inner peace* as much as *relational peace* within the Body of Christ. In fact, the thrust of the whole paragraph (3:12-17) is “Get along!”; this is so that the Body would continue to grow towards maturity.

II. *There is no such thing as clinging to Christ without Community. There is such a thing as Community without Christ; it's just not the Church!*

A. If the two extremes are 1) Christ without community or 2) community without Christ, *where would you place yourself on the spectrum?*

B. *Growth that comes from God flows through the Body by way of relationship.*
Please release new life in our community so that everyone belongs to a group.
Please release new life in our community through 100 new discipling commitments worldwide.

C. *Being open to the growth that comes from Christ through His Body requires relational energy and time.*

D. Being open to the growth that comes from Christ through His body requires intentionality and purpose...*cling to the Head!* There is a difference between merely being relationally connected and being open to the growth that comes from God.