

Intro:

This afternoon I want to continue my survey of my philosophy of the church.

We began with *It's not Your Church*. Whose church is it?

Last time we considered *It's a Building*. The main idea that I wanted to get across in that message was *it needs organization*. I am not sure I was as successful as I wanted to be with that message, so I may come back to it later.

Today I want to consider what to me is perhaps the most important metaphor of all for the *local* church, *It's a Body*.

I am going to work on this message keeping in mind a sub-title as well

*It's a Body:
it functions by interdependence [servant-fellowship]*

For this message, I don't have just one text. I have ten of them, and I'd like to read them all!

The concept of the body in the strife over tongues: 1 Cor 12.12-27

The concept of the body as the fullness of Christ: Eph 1.22-23

The concept of the body as the reconciliation of nations: Eph 2.13-16

The concept of the body as a marvelous mystery revealed: Eph 3.3-6

The concept of the body as a manifestation of union with Christ: Eph 4.1-6, 4.11-16

The concept of the body as the object of Christ's sacrificial love: Eph 5.23, 29-30

The concept of the body as submissive to Christ: Col 1.18

The concept of the body as receiving spiritual sustenance from Christ: Col 2.18-19

The concept of the body as the place of peace: Col 3.15

Aren't those marvelous texts? There are many ideas in them, we surely won't cover them all, but I want to give you a philosophy of what it means to be a body, especially as a local church. (There is a wider body of Christ than the local church, but the New Testament is primarily concerned with the local church.)

Proposition: The local church as the body of Christ lives by the bonds by which it is connected through the indwelling and interacting Spirit of Jesus Christ.

I. The concept of interdependence (1 Cor 12)

A. Most ably expressed (Eph 4.16)

1. “Fittedly joined” – architectural sense, fitted together like a building “designed to emphasise strongly the interplay of the different ministries and tasks within the body”¹
2. “Compacted”
 - a. Means strictly ‘to cause to stride together’ in Gk usage, but metaphorical uses abound
 - b. “According to ... Eph. 4:16 the body is held together by the head. In the context the accent is on the fact that the community’s life comes from Christ and is mediated to the members by the [“joints”, *i.e.*, ligaments].”²

B. Most thoroughly expounded – in settling a conflict (1 Cor 12)

1. Many members = one body = Christ (12)
2. The distinctions and distinctives of individual members do not negate the unity of the body (13-16)
3. The distinctions and distinctives of individual members are necessary for the body to function (17-21)
4. The seemingly weaker vessels are indispensable (22)

Try operating your physical body without a pancreas, or without kidneys.

5. The value of even the least honorable members is illustrated by the human body (23-24a)

We adorn our ‘unseemly parts’ with clothing – giving them an honour that our more honorable parts do not have.

6. God’s construction of the body [both physical and spiritual] is intended that each member minister interdependently to the others for the good of the whole – in order to produce no schism (24b-25)

¹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 7:856.

² *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976). 7:764.

7. The sickness or weakness of one member causes the whole to suffer (26)
8. The metaphor summarized (27)
 - a. You collectively are Christ's body
 - b. You individuals are members of Christ's body

Now all of this discussion of interdependence occurs in the midst of the resolution of conflict. (In this case, the conflict is over speaking in tongues.)

Notice how Paul concludes the discussion of the conflict – “yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (31)

II. The key to interdependence (1 Cor 13)

- A. Gifts and spiritual activity without genuine love = NOTHING (1-3)
- B. Description of love (4-7)

Recall my title and sub-title:

It's a Body:

it functions by interdependence [servant-fellowship]

There is a lot of talk in the books about ‘servant leadership’. Some of what is said using that term is acceptable, the idea being expressed is reasonably biblical, but I think the term has become greatly over-used.

Luke 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. ²⁷ For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.

John 13:12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? ¹³ Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. ¹⁴ If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. ¹⁷ If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

I ask you, in the Lord's instructions, where is the idea of leadership at all?

Here is the emphasis in the Bible: "serve" and "among you" – not 'servant-leadership' but 'servant-fellowship'.

Proposition: The local church as the body of Christ lives by the bonds by which it is connected through the indwelling and interacting Spirit of Jesus Christ.

III. The fostering of interdependence

A. The Baptist sacrament: fried chicken (or is it coffee?)

B. The ministry of helps

1. Barn raising
2. Duncan bus
3. Seniors shopping days
4. Meals when sick
5. Building maintenance

Etc.

C. The excising of cancerous cells

1. Surgery
2. Chemo-therapy
3. Radiation

I am treating this subject facetiously, but it is vital to the health and interdependence of the true members of Christ.

Conclusion:

This message hasn't been extremely analytical. I am skimming over a large topic in the Bible.

But this metaphor, the church as a body... it is one of the things I am most concerned about.

There are some of you who are really fulfilling my vision of the church – your life is interwoven with others in the church and you are effectively ministering to one another.

Others aren't where I want you to be yet...

Some of you are barely here (at least you are warm bodies in the pew... at least I hope you are warm!), but more commitment is needed...

None of us are perfect. We are all so tainted with selfishness that even our good deeds are sometimes suspect.

Let's each one draw near to Christ and fulfill His will in His body.