

We are the Body of Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

The more fascinating something is, the more we may describe it through multiple images, as if one image just isn't enough to capture it. Consider love. We describe love as power: There is electricity between us; or, love is a form of madness: I am just crazy about her; or love is magic: She cast her spell over me; or love causes physical effects: I am head over heels in love with him. Well, in the New Testament, the Church is like this. The Church is such a wonderful, complex, beautiful thing, no one image captures it. So, the Bible gives us multiple images; and today on *Groundwork*, we will begin pondering the image of the Church as the body of Christ. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are, with this program, beginning a five-part series looking at five of the various images that the Bible gives us for the Church.

DAVE BAST

That is right; and Scott, when you just mentioned the word *love* now in the introduction, it reminded me of a phrase: Love is a many splendored thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

And the Church is a many splendored thing. The Church is so vastly important in the New Testament that it has all these different metaphors or images to help us try to grasp and understand it, because it is really all about who we are as Christians; and so, we are the body of Christ...we are the bride of Christ...we are the family of God...we are the house or household of God...we are the temple of God. Those are the five images that we want to look at in this series.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We want to notice, too, that these images have real application to our lives as believers; and how we think about the Church determines how we think we function in the Church—who we are as believers—who we are to God. So, this has some real practical applications, and not just academic interest in these images.

DAVE BAST

Exactly. The great evangelist and hymn writer, John Wesley, once said that the New Testament knows nothing of solitary Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is really all about the Church, and we are joined to one another as we come to life in Christ. So, we could start, for example with a verse...just one verse for now...from 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes very simply in verse 27:

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is a very simple statement on this particular image, the body. That comes at the end of a longer section. We are going to get to that in a little bit in this program, but here is Paul putting this in a slightly different way again; this time in Ephesians 4, starting at verse 15:

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every aspect the mature body of him who is the head, that is Christ. ¹⁶From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

DAVE BAST

So, it is really a pretty simple analogy or image. I think we can all get that. We are the body...we are all the different parts of the body. Christ is the head. He is at the top. He is the center. He is the one from whom life flows...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is the one who leads. He is the one who gives commands. All of that, as the head directs the rest of the body, so Christ directs his Church.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; now of course, when Jesus was on this earth...and we believe still to this day that once Jesus took on human flesh, he will always be an incarnate Son of God. We forget that sometimes, but that is a permanent state for him now; but when he was on this earth, Jesus had a real human body, you know, head and shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes. He had a real body; and that body was raised up in newness at Easter, but then left on the ascension, and the disciples were sort of left to wonder: Are we kind of orphans now? Is Jesus just gone from us? But then, after Pentecost, and after the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples, now turned Apostles, start to think about that, and they think: No, wait; Jesus' body isn't actually gone. It has been replaced by us. We now are Jesus' hands and feet—his legs and arms.

DAVE BAST

Yes, as we often like to say; and that is a great and wonderful truth. Jesus continues his ministry on earth through the Person of the Spirit, as the Spirit fills the Church to go out in mission—to be his mouth—to proclaim the Gospel—to be, as you said Scott, his hands and feet. So, all the things that the Church has traditionally and historically done in mission are an extension of what Jesus did in his physical body while he was here on earth. So, you think of medical missions, for example. Yes, it is not quite the miraculous, direct cures that Jesus would perform, but in a sense, it is doing the same thing. It is carrying on the same work; or education, the way the Church has founded institutions of training and colleges and universities throughout its history. All of this is still Jesus in action through the Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there are lots of applications and implications of that that we are going to get to in this program; but before we do, let's just pause in this first segment, Dave, and notice something that we might sometimes forget about, because this is a pretty familiar image. As the five images in this series go, this one probably is the best known of the five; but one thing we might miss in our over familiarity is that this is a very intimate image.

DAVE BAST

There is such a deep and intimate connection as well between our body and our mind and our spirit. I think one of the reasons we struggle so with death is that we understand that a corpse is not that person...not really. You know, sometimes we will say, especially to a child or to a young person: Well, you know, Grandma is not really there; that is not really Grandma. She is in heaven. But, deep down we know that just a spirit isn't...I mean, there is this intimate union between body and soul; and one without the other isn't the full person...it is not a complete person.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we do still feel attached to that body, and that is why burying a loved one is some of...the graveside committal can be the toughest part of the funeral for a lot of people because most of everything you knew about that person came to you in those hands and that touch...that mother who combed your hair when you were a child. So, we still feel that intimate connection to our loved ones' bodies; even when, indeed, we believe their spirit is with God, we mourn that they aren't in that body anymore; and you know, this makes me think, too, Dave, is it possible that if Jesus regards the Church as his body, does he regard the Church a little bit the way we regard our own bodies? I mean, you know, we have our personal spaces. If somebody hurts us, you know, it hurts us mentally and physically. We identify with our bodies...protect our bodies...we mourn when our body is disabled or injured or something breaks. Does Jesus feel that way about the Church?

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, certainly there are things that would suggest that, even in the New Testament. You think of the famous story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And he sees this vision of the risen Lord, and Jesus says to him: Saul, Saul; why do you persecute me? What do you mean? Paul said. Well, you are hunting down these Christians. That is persecuting me. I feel that. I so identify with my people that when they suffer, I suffer. In fact, Paul would also say later in one of his letters: I complete, in my own body, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. So, there is, indeed, an intimate connection still between Christ and his body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is a great image, by the way, yes; not: Saul, Saul; why are you persecuting those people? Those people are me because they are my body.

So, as images go, this one is pretty intimate—pretty tender—pretty amazing; but there is a lot to ponder about what that means for all of us who are a part of that body; and we are going to take up some of that in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and we are in this first program of images in the Bible for the Church; and today, the Church as the body of Christ. And Dave, earlier we quoted just a single line from 1 Corinthians 12, but the larger chapter there is important, as is remembering why Paul wrote what he did.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Corinthian Christians...and we have talked about the Corinthian church before here on *Groundwork* in different contexts...but the Corinthian church appears to have been divided on about everything it could possibly be divided over. These believers were squabbling a lot, including in no small part, over the matter of gifts and abilities.

DAVE BAST

Right; and they had broken into factions. I mean, the letter of 1 Corinthians begins right off the get-go with Paul kind of condemning them for claiming to be part of this group or that group or the other group, and thinking they were better than others; and that carried over, too, into the different roles that they played in church life and in worship; and some seemed to have thought that because they had a more obvious or upfront sort of role, they were better than those who were not...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes; if you could preach a real flashy, outstanding sermon, you were regarded as more important than the person who would just quietly bring a meal to sick people; or you know, if you could speak in tongues during a worship service, well, you were more important than the person who swept the sanctuary after the service; but Paul didn't want to have anything to do with that kind of hierarchy, or kind of grading each other in terms of who is more or less important.

DAVE BAST

So, here is how he develops the argument in 1 Corinthians 12, beginning at verse 12: Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit, so as to form one body. ¹⁵Now, if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not, for that reason, stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not, for that reason, stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But, in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

SCOTT HOEZEE

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," and the head cannot say to the feet, "I do not need you." ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable; ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable, we treat with special honor; and the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment; but God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it. ²⁵So there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other; ²⁶and if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

DAVE BAST

Yes; so, let's just pause for a moment because what we have read is sacred scripture, you know...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And we tend, very rightly so, to be reverent about the Bible; but this is actually comic book almost, what Paul is doing here. If you look at what he says in the early part of that, he is conjuring up a mental picture of

an absurd caricature. Just imagine, the body was one whole giant eyeball, and that is all it was...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just rolling down the sidewalk, or something.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I mean, this takes a cartoonist, really, to depict. And Paul says: That is my point. That is ridiculous. If you only have one kind of gift...if you only have one kind of person...you don't have a body. You've got some kind of caricature.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Paul is being tongue firmly imbedded in cheek here, I think, more than we realize when we read these words; because indeed, this is absurd. This is like a cartoon. A giant ear, just sitting on a park bench. What good is a giant ear, sitting on a park bench? It cannot move; it cannot go anywhere; it cannot serve anybody dinner. Well, that is ridiculous, Paul says; but you guys are being just as ridiculous. The preacher sitting on a park bench thinking you are the whole body because you can preach, and...no, no, no; everybody is important; and, you know, even with Paul's imagery here, we could still, you know, I suppose, try to downgrade ourselves, thinking: Well, boy; in the body of Christ, what am I? A pinkie. Maybe I'm a big toe in the body of Christ. Maybe I am a gallbladder in the body of Christ. People weren't praying about gallbladders in the 1st Century, but the point being...

DAVE BAST

Maybe an appendix...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

That vestigial organ that nobody has a use for, yes. Who am I?

SCOTT HOEZEE

But Paul says, even if you are that, you serve a purpose. God put this thing together so that it would work together, and when it works together, it is a wonderful thing. You honor one part, you honor them all; and so, let's not go down this road where we think we are unimportant.

In fact, Dave, at a worship symposium at Calvin College a while back, I heard a scientist give a presentation on the wonderful nature of the human body; and he had a series of slides that showed what has to happen for you just to raise your hand up in the air; and so, he says: You know, it starts in your brain in the neurons, and then it goes through things called dendrites and axons. An electrical signal fires and it goes through ion channels, all the way from the brain to your muscle in your arm. Then the voltage charge binds itself to your arm muscles; it releases a protein that stimulates the release of calcium that attaches to myofilaments. It makes your muscle fibers contract and push against each other, and BOOM! Now you have raised your hand into the air to answer a question in class. That all takes about 0.25 seconds to happen. Paul said the parts of the body that seem weaker are indispensable; and boy, did he say a mouthful; more than he knew.

DAVE BAST

Yes; he certainly didn't know any of that physiology, but he did understand that the body as an organism is unified, sophisticated in the way it operates; and without the things behind the scenes, and below the surface, nothing happens.

So, the first point, I think, he really wants to drive home for us: Maybe you are thinking: you know, I am not that important in my church. I mean, my church has maybe hundreds of people, maybe thousands of people. I wouldn't be missed, whether I was part of it or not. No; not so, says Paul. Every single part of the body is important...is indispensable...and is known to God and has a purpose that God has given it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is indeed so important. We will talk about this a little bit in the final part of the program, as well; but you know, you do hear people say this sometimes: Oh, you know, in my church there are a bunch of retired missionaries, and there are some seminary professors; people who work with Wycliffe Bible translators...they did important work. I just bake pies and, you know, send cards to people in the hospital; but boy, compared to those missionaries, I am just not important. Again, Paul is saying: No, that is not true. Everything...everything has to go right in the body just for you to raise your hand, as we said a minute ago. Everything...everything has to go right in the body of Christ for it to do anything.

DAVE BAST

And you know, here is another point that he makes out of this same idea; and that is that no part of the body can say to another part: I don't need you...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

In fact, he literally says that in 1 Corinthians 12. The eye or the hand cannot say to the foot, I don't need you*. You cannot look around at your church and say of any person there: I don't need you. We need one another; and I think it would be a great thought experiment if you are part of a church; just close your eyes for a minute and imagine those people who sit around you. You need those people and they need you; and that is what Paul wants us to understand. So, we will just dig into that basic idea a little bit more before we wrap up this program.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you listening to *Groundwork*, and this first program in a five-part series on images from the Bible that describe, or try to capture, an aspect of the Church; and in this program, we have been thinking about that well-known image of the Church as the body of Christ.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, I guess what we have focused on, really, with that image is the interconnectedness of the whole congregation. When Paul is thinking about the Church here, he is thinking about the local church. He is writing to the Corinthians, and their squabbles and their divisions and their factions and their tendency to sort of be dismissive of one another if they thought they were better; and so, Paul wants to put a stop to that and say: No, we need each other. We are all connected. Whether our place is high or low, whether our role is prominent or seemingly insignificant, we are all part of the same body, and every part needs every other part.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul also addresses this idea of the body, not just in Corinthians where we have been, but in Romans 12; and here he gives it a slightly different spin. So, listen to these words:

³For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought; but rather think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach. ⁸If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously. If it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

DAVE BAST

So, I love the way he sort of specifies here, not the different body parts, which he does in 1 Corinthians 12...you know, arm, eye, hand, foot; where we are left sort of guessing: Well, what does that part do? Here he talks about gifts. He says we all have the same faith. We have a common faith; the faith that God has given us; and so we ought to be thinking in accordance with that faith; but we have different gifts, and those gifts are as varied as prophesying, which we take to mean primarily in our terms preaching or teaching God's Word; serving; there is teaching literally; to encourage one another—that is a gift—think about that—the gift of being an encourager; the gift of giving, and he is talking about financial giving there; the gift of leading...that is pretty important; but showing mercy...that is also a gift; and in that way, the body is functioning in a healthy manner...when these gifts are all being carried out according to the one that God has given us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is also interesting, Dave, that he makes very clear here that each of those gifts is in accord with God's grace. So, we are saved by grace, right? We know we are saved by big capital G—grace. It says by grace you have been saved; but then, there are all these little gracelets that flow. It is sort of like water flowing out of the top tier of a fountain. You've got all these little graces that connect right back to the big grace in Christ. So, if you are really good at encouraging people, that is a grace. That is a part of the grace that saved you; that is a little gracelet...a little *charismata* as they say in the Greek language. It is a gift given to you. It ties in with the big *charis*—the big grace of God. So, do what you do. Do what you do well and diligently; and when you do, this whole thing...and don't worry about what other people do...and certainly, do not downplay the importance of what you do, nor play up somebody who looks more flashy than you, or more important. No; if everybody does what they are supposed to do, then it is like a well-functioning gallbladder and spleen and muscles and blood vessels and neurons and whatnot...the whole body just will hum along.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I love that idea that these different gifts are gifts of grace, because that reminder helps us carry out Paul's initial instruction in this passage, which is don't think too highly of yourself...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Or, don't think more highly than you ought to; which is not to say don't put yourself down, as you said. We can err in two directions on that whole idea; but if what I am and what I do is simply God's gift through me for the body, then I am not going to think I am too important or any big deal. I am going to be able to put even my role into perspective, and also appreciate the role of others; because, let's be honest, it is a challenge and a temptation...for example maybe, for a leader or a preacher in particular, not to think: Well, this is *my* church. I am the most important person here because I am up front; and I think Paul wants us to say: Huh-uh; no; don't go that route.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And maybe one final application of this is that by extension, if you are part of the body, you are supposed to be doing something. Different parts of our bodies are more active at other times than some others. You know, if we are reading a book, we are going to be using parts of our body differently than when we take a hike up a mountain; but, for church members to be lazy or inactive, or just to say, you know: I'll let other people do the work. No, Paul would say. You also...you may be a spleen; you may be a blood vessel; you may be a big toe or a pinkie in the body of Christ, but you are supposed to do your big toe, pinkie, spleen thing. So, the body of Christ is not supposed to be a couch potato; but the only way we can prevent that from happening is if everybody is doing something...whatever it is they are good at. So, inactivity, and just concluding: Oh, there are enough other talented people here; I don't need to do anything...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The church will be fine. I can just sort of, you know, show up and leave and eat food at the potluck, and I don't have to do anything else. No, Paul would say, you are part of a body, you need to do something for the body to function.

DAVE BAST

Yes; nobody rides other people's coattails, or at least they are not supposed to...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And we certainly do...as you pointed out, I think, Scott...we certainly do notice it when some part of our body is not functioning correctly, and the same thing is true for the body of Christ. We are all in this together, friends. It is a wonderful idea—a wonderful image. Each of us is a member of it. Each of us is important. What a great idea, and what an ever greater truth to savor.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time, as we study the image of the Church as the bride of Christ.

Connect with us at our website, groundworkonline.com, and share what *Groundwork* means to you; or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misattributes this paraphrase to Romans 12, which is another passage in which the Apostle Paul describes the church as the body of Christ (Romans 12:3-8). The correct attribution for this paraphrase is 1 Corinthians 12:21.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/we-are-the-body-of-christ>

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