

1. Building up the Church in Love

The New Testament portrays the church in several ways. For example, it is called the body and the church in the same sentence in Eph. 1:23, “. . . He . . . gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body . . .” The church is variously called the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), an elect race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (I Pet. 2:9). Whatever the church is called, the designation is synonymous for that group of penitent, baptized believers of whom it was said in Acts 2:47: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as were saved.” Paul added to this idea, “For in one spirit were we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, each word used for the church carries a meaning about the church that is instructive as to the church’s purpose, nature, scope, or character. For example, the word *church* speaks of the called out body; the word *kingdom* speaks of it in relation to Christ the King; house of God, to God our Father and Christ our elder brother.

The Church the Body; Christ the Head

It is the word, *body*, which describes the functioning of the members of the church in relation to one another and in relation to Christ the head of the body. This member to member and member to head relationship is described in detail in two passages: 1 Cor. 12:12-31 and in Eph. 4:15-16.

The Lessons of the Head and Body Metaphor

I Cor. 12 applies the idea of the human head and body metaphorically and in great detail to Christ and the church. The passage teaches us by this analogy several important lessons:

- V.12: There is one body and one Christ.
- V.13: The only way into the body is baptism.
- V.14: It takes all the members not one.
- V.18. God has set the members in the body as it pleases him.
- V.21: One member cannot say to the other, “I have no need of you.”
- V.22: Abundant honor is bestowed on all the members of the body.
- V.25: There is no division in the body.
- V.25: The members should have the same care for one another.
- V.26: If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.
- V.26 If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.
- V.27 You are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof.

As members of the church of Christ we are each one integrated into a unified whole, where we each work and worship for the head—Christ—as he directs us. The church is at the same time unified and productive.

How the Body Is Strengthened

Eph 4:15-16 applies the same head and body analogy to the church but emphasizes those characteristics that give a body its strength:

- V.15 Speaking the truth in love, [the members] may grow up in all things to him, who is the head, even Christ.
- V.16 From Christ, all the body is fitly framed and knit together.

V.16 Every joint supplies, according to the working of due measure of each several part.

V.16 This makes the increase of the body unto building up of itself in love.

The church in this case is like the human body. The eyes, the joints, the muscles, the bones, the nervous system—all of these and more must work together to do even the smallest of tasks. There is no room for faction or division in the body. Therefore, the church members must all work together in love to accomplish the great tasks that Christ—the head—has left for us to do. The watchwords of our great labor in the Lord are love, unity, and peace. The end of it all is “the building up of itself in love” (Eph.4:16).

How Individuals Strengthen the Body

Each member of the Lord’s church can become a strong force for the Lord by focusing on these passages. We can all be unified with the other members, unite by speaking the truth in love, and take direction from Christ our head in all matters that “pertain to life and Godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue”(II Peter 1:3).