

20. The Epistle to the Ephesians II

I. The church, the building which becomes a temple (2:19-20) God in the Spirit dwells in it. Apostles and (Christian) prophets are the foundation of the church whose akrogoniaios, the capstone or cornerstone, is Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3:1).

II. The church, the Body of Christ: The image first appears in 1:22-23 but there are major differences from Paul's use of the image in Romans and 1 Corinthians: The church (ekklesia) is the church universal rather than a local assembly. The body is distinguished from its head, which makes the body only a torso. As the body of Christ, the church is presented within a cosmic perspective, whereas in Paul's undisputed letters body imagery is employed in function of the unity of the local community.

The body image recurs in 2:16 in a passage on Christ's reconciliation of Jew and Gentile. The image occurs again, without mention of Christ as head of the church, at the beginning of the hortatory part of the letter (4:1-6): an exhortation on the unity of the church. Seven reasons for the unity of the church: The first triad: one body, one Spirit, and one hope. The second triad: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The climactic seventh reason: "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all"

A note on the importance of love and the avoidance of socially disruptive vices (4:31): Were it not for the nine times that "love" (agape) is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13, love is mentioned more often in Ephesians than it is in any other letter in the Pauline corpus.

Gifts: As does Paul in 1 Corinthians, Ephesians talks about the gifts given for the sake of the body. "Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (4:7). With a rewriting of Ps 58:19, the author says that the risen Christ "gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers for building up the body of Christ" (4:11-12). Differences from what Paul wrote about the gifts. The gifts are called "grace" (charis) rather than "gift" (charisma). The gifts are said to come from the risen Christ rather than from the Spirit. The gifts that are cited are exclusively gifts of leadership, gifts of proclaiming and teaching the gospel.

The exhortation to "grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love" (4:15-16)

III. The church, Christ's spouse (5:21-32) The author's appropriation of the wife-husband component of Colossians' household code (Col 3:18-19) provides an occasion for another exposition on the church, body of Christ. B) The church is the body (5:30), and Christ is its head (5:23). Christ loves the church, but the church is subordinate to Christ, as a wife in the culture of the day was expected to be subordinate to her husband. The marital imagery of the text reflects the Old Testament imagery of Yahweh as the spouse of Israel. The way in which Christ prepares the church, his bride, for the marital union (5:25-27) is replete with baptismal imagery.

Review Questions

1. What aspects of the church does the author teach about when he uses the metaphor of the building?
2. What aspects of the church does the author teach about when he uses the metaphor of the body?
3. What aspects of the church does the author teach about when he uses the metaphor of marriage?