

The ABC's of Discipleship

C - Committing and Submitting to a Church and a People

May 12, 2019 Forest City Bible Church
Sermon Series: The ABC's of Discipleship
Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 2:19-22; 5:21-33

"THE BODY, THE BUILDING, THE BRIDE OF JESUS!"

It is quite common to describe our relationships through similes and metaphors.

A simile is a comparison using like or as. For instance, as we husband's say to our wives every day: "I need you like a flower needs the rain." A metaphor is a direct statement of comparison.

I came across a few that children have written for Mother's Day.

- Emma: "Mom, you are the sunset, and I am the waves. You're always watching over me each and every day."
- Maya: "My Mom is a firework, bursting with elegant colours."
- Nathen: "My Mom is a candle she lights up my world."
- Hayden: "Mom, you are a star always shining even if I can't see you."
- Delaney: "Mom, you blow away my thunderstorms on a cloudy day."
- Cassidy: "Mom, you are my sun, starting and ending my day."
- Adeola: "My mother is a paintbrush, adding colour to the dullest of days."
- Justin: "Mom, you are the rain that makes me blossom."

So why start out talking about metaphors? Let me explain: We are continuing to learn the ABC's of Discipleship. Here at Forest City Bible Church we are focussed on Making Disciples and we want you to understand the Biblical process for becoming a mature and committed follower of Jesus.

- A - Accepting the Lordship of Christ above all else.
- B - Being in Christ and Christ being in us.
- C - Committing and Submitting to a Church and a People.
- D - Devoted to prayer and study of the Scripture.
- E - Engaged in the mission to make disciples.
- F-G - Filled with the Holy Spirit and Going.

Today is the Letter C. Committing and Submitting to a church and a people.

The Word of God uses many different metaphors to describe what it means to be a part of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many images in the New Testament revealing what the church is theologically and in order to understand what it means to be committed and submitted to a church and a people we are going to look at three clear pictures of the church found in the book of Ephesians.

Metaphors that describe our relationship to Jesus and to one another.

Paul describes the church through the images of the church as a **body**, a **building** and a **bride** and we learn that our life as a community of disciples proceeds from within the life of our God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

These three metaphors unfold the mystery of Christ's intimate relationship with the church that He loves.

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1. WE ARE HIS BODY: Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16
2. WE ARE HIS BUILDING: Ephesians 2:19-22
3. WE ARE HIS BRIDE: Ephesians 5:21-33

1. WE ARE HIS BODY: Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16

Ephesians 1:22-23 (ESV) "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

Ephesians 4:15-16 (ESV) "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

The church is first of all a body and like every other body, this body has a Head. Christ is the Head of the church. Believers are members of His body.

We are united with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13-14 (ESV) makes that clear: "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many."

We are connected to our Head and we are also connected inseparably to other members of the Body, to other believers. You can't be close to Christ and keep your distance from the rest of His body. Paul expands on how vital each part of the body is in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

The way that you treat the body is the way that you treat Christ Himself. And ultimately how you view other members of the body speaks to how you view Jesus. John 13:35 (ESV) "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Growing in our relationship with Christ is why being a member of the body is such an important picture for us to grasp. Our membership in the body is based on commitment and submission.

Accepting the Lordship of Christ above all else. Being in Christ and Christ being in us. This is where we need to understand what that commitment means in a practical way in the local church, this body of believers who represent the body of Christ and who worship in this place.

We have learned through the book of Acts that those who were saved on the Day of Pentecost were baptized and added to the church. They became a part of Christ's body identifying with Him through believer's baptism and they identified with the local body of believers, at this point this was the only church in town.

The story is told of a man stranded all alone on an island. He begins sending smoke signals, hoping that somebody will find him. Ten years pass, and finally a boat is sailing by and the captain notices the smoke signals, and decides to pull into the island. When he docks, he sees three huts.

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The man runs out and embraces the captain, and says, "Thank you for rescuing me!" The captain says, "No problem, where are the others?" The man says, "There is only me, I am all alone on this island."

The captain, confused, asks, "If you are all alone, then why are there three huts?"

The man says, "Well, the first hut is where I live, that's my home. The second hut is my church, where I worship." The captain asks, "And what is the third hut?" The man says, "Oh, that was the church I used to go to."

We grow by identifying with Christ and His body the church and we grow by submitting ourselves to the leadership of the church and by serving in the church. Through the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper we identify with Christ and participate in remembering His body and His blood. It is He who has gifted each believer to serve in the body, using his or her gifts to glorify God.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV) "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." In this community, the church Romans 12:5 (ESV) "we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Membership in the body is important, it allows us to have a say in decisions made, to serve in various ways using our gifts and to reflect the unity of the body of Christ that meets in this place. Because membership in the body is so important we want to hold a membership class soon. We are His body.

2. WE ARE HIS BUILDING:

Ephesians 2:19-22 Ephesians 2:19-22 (ESV)

"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

The church is a building (not a physical building but a spiritual building), and it is a very special kind of building, a temple. The dwelling place for God's glory. It is the place where God lives. And in this building, this temple Christ figures prominently. He is the foundation, He is the Cornerstone and we are the living stones that make up that temple.

Reflecting its participation in the life of the entire Trinity, the church is simultaneously "in" the Son, is "the dwelling place of" the Father, and it is happening "by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). The metaphor of the temple compels the reader to see the church living in unity with the ever-present Three-in-One God. The picture of the body shows diversity the picture of the building indicates unity.

The church is made holy in and through the presence of the triune God. That is why the unity of the church is so important. We are told in Ephesians 4:3 (ESV) that we are to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We don't have time this morning to go fully into Peter's picture of the building but I would encourage you to read what he says in 1 Peter chapter 2.

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We are His body. We are His building.

3. WE ARE HIS BRIDE:

Ephesians 5:21-33

Ephesians 5:21-33 (ESV) "Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

This metaphor sets out commitment and submission clearly through the picture of the marriage relationship. This means that we have a covenant relationship with Christ and with one another. That's commitment, and from commitment flows the right understanding of submission.

Husbands you are told three times to love your wife.

- First, as Christ loves the church,
- Second, as you love your own body.
- And third as you love yourself.

Three times, because we men are thick. As believers we are thick too. We don't understand how much Christ loves us! His love for us is the basis for our commitment. We love Him because He first loved us! (1 John 4:19) That forms the basis for us to love one another. And that love is expressed through submission.

Submission is not just for women! Amen? Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)

"Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Wives are told to submit to their own husbands as to the Lord. As the church submits to Christ, wives should submit to their husbands. And wives are told to respect their husbands.

Husbands, love, love, love. Wives, submit, submit, respect.

The result of loving as Christ loved is respect. I like to use the phrases "loving leadership" and "joyful submission." God's design for marriage that leads to a complete and lasting unity.

Drawing upon the divine plan at creation for the marriage relationship between a husband and his wife, between a man and a woman, Paul points to God's plan for a husband and a wife to "become one flesh" (31-32).

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The relationship between the church and her Lord is so intimate that nothing remains between the two of them: they have become one! That's why marriage is based on commitment. It is not just living together it is sharing life in a relationship based on commitment, communication and companionship.

For the church: In this most perfect of relationships, Jesus Christ is the "head of the church," while the church submits humbly to Him. He loves the church and sacrifices His own life for her (25). He sanctifies and cleanses the church through His Word (26). Jesus Christ presents her to Himself "in splendor," unmarred by any imperfection (27).

The first person to picture Christ as a groom was John the Baptist (John 3:29). He saw Christ as the groom and His faithful followers as the bride.

Every marriage should be cause for celebration, but the marriage between Christ and His church is something for the entire universe to celebrate for all eternity.

John brings that out in the book of Revelation: Just quickly the church is pictured as "the bride, the Lamb's wife" in glory (Revelation 21:9). The church as dressed in white; indicating blameless character.

The glorious church is called to the "marriage supper of the Lamb," and clothed in fine linen, bright and pure (Revelation 19:7-9).

God Himself dwells with and among His people, the glorious church. The church is the bride of the Lamb, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, who judges in righteousness as a Lion, and lives with His people forever.

So how do we prepare now for that glorious forever? It's as easy as ABC.

- A - Accepting the Lordship of Christ above all else.
- B - Being in Christ and Christ being in us.
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As His bride, we experience intimate communion with Him now, while anticipating the wedding feast to come when the Groom will reveal Himself in all His splendour and we will share in His glory.

As His building, the temple, we experience the glorious reality of God actually dwelling in us and among us.

As His body, we operate and cooperate as one whole unit, under the direction of the Head, to grow and function according to His purposes and to accomplish His assignments until His return.

We, the church, are God's building, Christ's bride and body, and the Holy Spirit's temple. We are His because God made Himself ours.

These images picture that glorious mystery of God's love for His people and the opportunity He has given us to live and to function in intimate fellowship with Him and with each other, as we live in the now and look forward to forever.

But within those beautiful pictures of the church there is also the possibility of big problems. Bodies, buildings and brides (marriages) have issues. Sometimes there is dysfunction. Other times distraction.

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There can be difficult discussion. And at times terrible division. But Christ loves His church and He loves you and wants you to be a part of it. It is based on relationship to Jesus.

And He wants you to be a part of the local group of believers. The local church is the visible expression of the Body, the Building and the Bride.

The local church is both an organism and an organization. Some want one without the other. Both are important.

Look around, we are not all the same, but we love and serve the same Lord.

Through multiple generations, with different backgrounds, at differing seasons of life we join together in a common calling to know Jesus and to make Him known by making disciples.

The church has its flaws and its issues to be sure. Every church does because it's made up of people like you and me, but it is still the Bride, the Building and the Body of Christ.

We can't love the head and reject the Body.

In his book *The Living Church*, John Stott says, I trust that none of my readers is that grotesque anomaly, an unchurched Christian. The New Testament knows nothing of such a person. For the church lies at the very centre [sic] of the eternal purposes of God.

It is in the church that God's people are taught the Word, are encouraged and equipped for service. The purpose of those gifted to teach is explained in Ephesians 4:12-13 (ESV) "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Nancy Demoss Woglemuth says: You need the local church. You need it: for support, for encouragement, for accountability, for discipline, It is dangerous to be at a place in your life where you are not plugged in to the life of a local church. And we talk about being engaged. I don't mean just going and parking your body in a pew for one hour on Sunday morning and then high-tailing it out of there and not having any other connection to the Body. You need to be plugged in. You need to be connected.

Your local church needs you. They need: your gifts, your prayers, your encouragement, your support. We need not only to be engaged but to be submitting to our spiritual leaders. What does that look like?

It means when we hear the Word, we put ourselves under the authority of the preached Word.

It means: C - Committing and Submitting to a Church and a People.