

## The Doctrine of the Church

Jonathan K. Dodson | October 28, 2017

Division is in the air. Differences over gender, race, and religion, to name a few, make the internet boil and people snap. But division is not something that should mark the Church. Of all people in the world, the Church should be the most unified. We possess both the *responsibility* and *resources* to display compelling unity. How do we get there? We need a Head, a Body, and Stature. The head tells us *what the church is*, the body *to practice unity*, and stature *to grow*? Using human anatomy, Ephesians gives us a vision of compelling unity in times of division.

### Head

We're living in a society that values flat structures, it can be difficult to appreciate authority. We love to crowdsource information, go fund me to get a project off the ground, and grassroots organizations like Occupy. By the time the protestors were evicted from Zuccotti Park in Manhattan, Occupy spread to 900 cities, *but not a single U.S. policy had changed*. Observing trends in flat, leaderless organizations, political philosophers have raised serious questions about their effectiveness. The plain fact is organizations that succeed have *heads that tell them what to do, paint a vision for what they should be*: Facebook Zuckerberg, Apple Jobs, Weinstein, go down the list. But what these heads often lack is *character to support power*. But what if there was an organization whose leader never lacked character? Jesus. As his life of suffering and service demonstrate, he is the one true Human with enough character to wield the power of the world. He is the Head of the greatest organization, organism. Spanning seven continents, serving humanity for over two thousand years, Jesus is the head of *the Church*. Noting Jesus is far above all rule and authority and power, Paul says God put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body" (22). Notice a couple things. First, Jesus is head over all. He is the head of the cosmos, the king of creation, the potentate of time. In the words of Abraham Kuyper, "There is not one square inch over all the earth that Christ has not declared 'Mine!'" Jesus is unmatched in power and authority. What are the implications for the church? This means wherever we go Jesus goes; the church scattered brings justice, mercy, good culture, forgiveness, hope into the city through individual and collective efforts. But *also* notice although Jesus is the head over all things he is given to one thing, the Church. He is the Head of the Body. Exceeding the CEOs of our time he puts his authority and power to work for humanity in an unparalleled way. Chapter two, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...children of wrath...but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, made us alive together with Christ (2:1-5). And how did he make us alive together? By being crucified alone, abandoned by all. Jesus uses his limitless power to die a lonely, sacrificial death to make us *alive together*. He saves us into his Body, the Church, not into a private relationship. Alive together *not* apart. Now, there are two aberrations to this. The first is the *bobblehead Jesus*, big head, tiny body. This happens when Christians say they love Jesus but not the church. They claim Jesus as their Lord, but have little connection to the body. This distorts the image of Jesus to the world. An important way to avoid this is by becoming a partner or member of the local church, an active commitment to the welfare of a local community that gladly embraces accountability to local, qualified spiritual leaders. Without this commitment, church is easily reduced to a

bobblehead Jesus, You need others; others need you. We cannot thrive in isolation. The other aberration is *bobblebody Jesus*. Bloated body, tiny head. This the person who is all in on community but rarely pays attention to Jesus. Lots of social connection, but very little gospel connection. This too is unhealthy because you'll eventually make a god of the community, expecting them to serve and satisfy you in a way only Jesus ultimately can. These aberrations distort the compelling stature of Christ.

## Body

How, then, do we live *alive together*? How can we display an image of Christ that is compelling to the world? Paul addresses in chapter four: "I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:1). What's the calling? To be a united Body to the Head of *Jesus*. To adorn the head, live up to It, not down to individual selves. The church is compelling when it puts the gospel on display, not individual agendas, pet issues, or personal expectations. How do we do this? We're given three things: humility, gentleness, and patience. The opposite of **humility** is pride. Pride is divisive. Pride holds a grudge. Pride puts my agenda first. It looks at what the church isn't doing for me. It's holding onto something so tightly that it actually overthrows Jesus from the top of your life. Bobblebody Jesus. Humility, on the other hand, unites. It doesn't hold a grudge, it holds onto Christ. Humility doesn't see issues; it sees opportunities to bear with one another in love. It reminds me of the people who, when they see a need or deficiency, they try to meet it. Like the people who have chosen to mentor our youth so we could create Youth Life, the CG leaders and hosts who foster community, people who are working to make our mercy ministries better, and elders who take initiative to pastor others. Humility is the chief virtue. Get it and **gentleness** follows. Over the years, I've noticed the difference between proud and humble people in a CG. A proud person easily frustrated by the lack of growth, depth, mission in a community comes to the leader (or complains to a friend) and says why aren't *you* doing more about this? The proud exclude themselves from the solution. Creates division not unity. They frequently don't last, abandoning the community in search of something to meet their standards. They fail to grasp a lesson an old pastor taught me, "*Accept the congregation as they are not as you would have them be.*" As a young pastor, I frequently got frustrated by the foolishness of the church, but as I mature, and get in touch with my own need for grace, I find myself more prone to accept people not as I would have them be but as they are. Pride divides but humility unites. The humble realize they have no reason to hold a grudge because Jesus bore the grudge of God's righteous wrath towards them. The humble become gentle. When that gets in deep, the humility and patience of the forgiving God, the gospel unites us and is much greater than the petty things that divide. If we're truly humble **patience** follows. Patience isn't putting up with people who let you down; it's almost forgetting they let you down in the first place. See, **fundamentally impatience is an emotional response to not being the Head, in control.** So when an impatient person says "I'm losing my patience," what they really mean is I'm losing control. This week I could not get one of my kids to get on board with getting ready for school. Clock was ticking. I got exasperated and rolled my eyes so my wife said on the way out the door, I hope things get better! **The gospel reminds me things are better than I deserve, that Jesus is Head of my life, God is in control, so I don't have to be.** And when I'm believing that I don't lose

my patience; *I am patient*. Why? Because *I am welcoming God's control*. The truly patient person recognizes things move at the speed of providence not personal preference. And this makes you gentle not exasperated. God has called us all to grow up into the Head, alive together, growing together as we pursue unity that's compelling to the world.

## Stature

The Head makes and directs the church, the Body puts the Head on display through unity, and the Body grows in *stature*. Paul writes, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 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” (11-13). Stature increases in three ways. First, **equippers**. Five are listed, which are represented among our elders and among some of you. Peter is an evangelist, he's always talking about Jesus. He's also a pastor. When we're discussing how to help people, Peter always has a concern they know they are loved. John and Paul are teachers. Their sermons are very clear, they love the truth, and can explain the Bible well. Matt is an apostle. He's thinking of new ways to do things, helps us improve with new suggestions. All of them care you deeply, equippers. If you have one of these gifts, you should be asking how can I use it to help equip the church toward its goal? To help us move toward maturity. Second, **builders**. Equippers equip others to do the work of ministry—building up the body of Christ. This is something we're all called to and it happens when we use our resources to help one another attain unity of the faith of the knowledge of the Son of God. This is unity that results from shared belief in Jesus. It's practicing humility, gentleness, and patience in community. It's speaking up in City Group to get to the truth, sharing your struggles, stopping to pray for one another throughout the day, serving one another, texting an encouraging word to someone, meeting to study the Bible in Fight Clubs, asking someone to mentor you, or initiating a mentor relationship with someone else. We need others and others need us to grow into our life together, into the Head. The church is compelling when it puts the gospel on display. The stature grows up and it also grows out. It needs **pioneers**, evangelists, church planters, Good Samaritans, people to share the good news. A missionary who worked in Sierra Leone points out that Ephesians 4 holds out a vision of a full-grown humanity—Head, Body, Stature—and what completes it is *the diversity of the nations*. The definable beauty of Christ, in his towering, cosmic stature, is a multi-ethnic humanity, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. They possess distinct cultures, languages and yet, they recognize one another as brother and sister; family in Christ. They are not ultimately defined by their ethnicity or race but by Christ. They are alive, diverse, and together, growing up into the head. We need pioneers to fill up the full stature of Christ, to present the variegated glory of God's multiethnic new humanity to the world. Now, one local church can't reach all the nations; that's why there is a universal church. But churches can make progress toward the full stature of Christ. Translating the gospel message in Irish, Quebecois, Swahili and the uttermost parts of the earth. We have all the resources we need in Christ to present to the world a big head *and* a big body, a people who eagerly seek the unity of the Spirit locally and globally to build up the historic, diverse, glorious Body of Christ. The Church, of which Christ is Head.