

# EPHESIANS AND HEBREWS: DEUTERO- AND PSEUDO- PAULINE LETTERS

## 1. EPHESIANS

Most modern scholars do not believe that Paul wrote the Letter to the Ephesians. The writer knew some of Paul's writings, to which he alludes. But the theological scheme of salvation—through the United Body of Christ—differs substantially from Paul's central doctrine of Justification by Faith. References to "the Church" are post-Paul, as is the essential conservatism of the Letter's vision of the family as a corporation ruled by the CEO husband.

The differences are become quite vivid when we compare the way Paul & deuterio-Paul use the metaphor of the Body to express the idea of Unity.

Here is how Paul imagines the Body of Believers:

[J]ust as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were

all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . God has so arranged the body . . . that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

(I Corinthians 12:12-14, . . .24-27)

What is the vehicle of the metaphor?

What is the tenor?

What values are expressed by the tenor?

Here is the Body according to the author of Ephesians:

There is **one body and one Spirit**, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. . . . 15 [W]e must grow up in every way into him who is **the head**, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.

(Ephesians 4:4-6, 15-16)

## What values are expressed by the tenor?

Emphasis on totality rather than diversity; subordination under a single head, rather than a complex interrelation of members; spiritual/material dualism implicit in head-body division, rather than spiritual equality. Paul, for example, talks about a diversity of gifts from one Spirit (I Corinthians 12:1-11).<sup>1</sup>

The **subjugation** of the body to the head, and the rigidly orthodox hierarchy that it implies, is **not** what Paul, or Jesus, taught.

## 2. Hebrews

The theology of the “Letter” to the Hebrews is even more radically anti-Pauline. It does not reflect any of Paul’s major concerns—justification by faith especially. It is a theological treatise, not a letter. Its audience is not really “the Hebrews” (whoever they might have been). Like Paul (only much more elaborately) the author reads the Hebrew Bible allegorically, as prefiguring the coming of the Messiah. Christ is a Priest-King who offers himself as a perfect atonement for our sins.

Despite its derivative, pseudo-Pauline authority, this “Letter” has been enormously influential in shaping the theology of orthodox Christianity.

Like Apocalyptic literature, it operates on a basic dualism: a complex set of analogies between physical things on earth and spiritual things in heaven. Every visible, earthly event corresponds to a greater, invisible reality. Thus:

HEAVENLY	PRIEST		PERFECT
	CHRIST	TEMPLE	SACRIFICE
TENOR	KING		X <sup>st</sup> = LAMB

EARTHLY	High		IMPERFECT
	PRIEST	TEMPLE	SACRIFICE
VEHICLE			LAMB

Earth is the (Platonic) SHADOW of Heaven.

**What’s wrong with this picture?**

[W]hen Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal

redemption. . . . [But] if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? (9:11-12; 10:26-29)

Therefore, according to the author of Hebrews, it is necessary to have FAITH (Chapter 11), to **believe** in the perfect sacrifice that Christ offered for us.

For Paul, however, despite his sometimes tortuous and torturous emphasis on “justification by faith,” what matters most is **acting** in LOVE, not believing the “truth”:

The only thing that counts, finally, is faith **working through love**. . . . For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” . . . Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (5:6, 14; 6:2)

1. This way of imagining human relationships has had very serious historical consequences, especially because it sanctions traditional power hierarchies that subjugate the weaker to the stronger. For example: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. . . . Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. . . . Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ.” (5:21-25; 6:1, 5)