

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

12th February 2005

Read: Ephesians 1: 15-23

Text: v.v. 22b, 23

The Church – Christ's Body

In these final verses of Eph 1 the Apostle Paul records that he was constantly engaged in prayer for God's people at Ephesus. Moreover, his particular request for them in prayer was that they would be given an understanding of the greatness of God's power toward them in enabling them to believe the Gospel. Paul's objective is obvious – he wants these Ephesian believers to see that who they are and what they are as Christians is owed entirely to divine power alone; and that human power, therefore, had no place whatsoever in their experience.

In order to bring home to their hearts that it was according to the working of God's mighty power in them that they believed and were saved, Paul refers to both the resurrection & the exaltation of Christ. He states that Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God by "*the exceeding greatness*" of God's power. His point is clear: no human power could either raise Christ from the dead or exalt Him to heaven. Such stupendous events could only result from the exercising of "*the energy of the strength of God's might...*" as the original text actually reads. But his application of this truth is also very clear – just as no human power raised and exalted Christ, so no human power will enable a sinner, spiritually dead because of sin, to believe the Gospel, come into union with Christ and be legally and positionally joined to Christ in His exaltation. Rather, it is by the working of God's mighty power that such an experience comes to pass.

Thus, Paul could have employed no greater illustration of the power that saves a sinner than that of Christ's being raised & exalted by divine power alone. Moreover, in drawing attention to the divine power that raised & exalted Christ, Paul was moved by the Spirit to present some marvellous facts about Christ in His exalted state. There is *the seat of His exaltation* – He is at God's own right hand in the heavenlies. Then there is *the scope of His exaltation* – it is both universal and eternal in scope. All things are under Christ's feet already, so it is a universal reign that He exercises. And it is also eternal for it is "*in this world...*" and "*in that which is to come...*" that He reigns. From our perspective, it extends from time right into all eternity – He shall reign forever and ever. In the final place, we noted *the scheme of His exaltation* – He is "the head over all things to the Church." In other words, the scheme or purpose of Christ's exaltation is that His Church will be the ultimate beneficiary. Christ is exalted and reigns in every realm for the good, the prosperity and the well-being of His redeemed people.

Consequently, in considering Paul's reasoning in this passage his line of thought is very clear. His reference to Christ's exaltation by God's mighty power is not only for the purpose of illustrating what has happened in the salvation of a sinner, it is also to show that the saving of any sinner can only take place on the basis of Christ's resurrection and exaltation to heaven. In other words, God's people can only experience the working of God's mighty power in their lives because of the working of that power in the experience of their exalted Head.

Thus, in coming to the final words of this passage we find that when Paul speaks of "the Church" he does so in this context of wanting God's people to recognise the greatness of God's power toward them. We must understand clearly the connection of thoughts here. Paul does refer to the Church which he also describes as Christ's *body*. But he makes this reference to the Church as Christ's spiritual body as He speaks of the exceeding greatness of God's power. Therefore, he is teaching that the Lord's people can see something of God's mighty power toward them in terms of the concept and doctrine of the Church *as the body of Christ*.

The doctrine of the Church is one of the great truths of Scripture to be studied and known by God's people. But we are not to study it in a theoretical or academic manner. According to this context we are to study this truth or doctrine in order to see how God's great power actually operates in us. To be specific, the way to realise the truth about God's power in our lives is to understand our relationship with Christ; and we can best understand our relationship with Christ through the truth that the Church is Christ's body. Note with me some principles about this truth that the Church is the body of Christ.

I. THE FIRST PRINCIPLE IS THAT OF UNION WITH CHRIST

Note the words – "*the head over all things to the church which is His body.*" Christ is the head and the church is the body – obviously Paul employs the analogy of the human body with its head. He does so frequently in his epistles: in Romans, Corinthians, & here in Ephesians and by suggestion in other epistles as well. But while this metaphor of the head & the body is the most common in Paul's writings, it is not the only one he uses in speaking of Christ & the Church. In this very epistle he uses other figures: ch.2: 19-22 – a building and its foundation; ch.3: 14, 15 – where believers are seen to be members in the family of God; and in ch.5 he compares the Church to a bride and Christ to a bridegroom. In all of these analogies but especially in that of the head & the body, the principle of union is clearly in view – Christ the Head and the Church the body are joined & united together.

1. This union between Christ & the Church is a vital & living union.

The analogy of the head & the body makes it clear that believers are not joined to Christ in some loose or mechanical fashion but are in a vital, organic union with one another, a fact seen in terms of the analogy used. The human body is comprised of various parts, but the essential truth is that all the parts constitute a unity. The parts of the body are not loosely attached to each other. Take the hand & its fingers – the fingers are not merely attached to the palm of the hand; rather they are joined to the palm so that one cannot tell exactly where the palm ends & the fingers begin. Thus the fingers are in a living union with the hand – they are one.

Thus in the whole human body the union of all the parts is living, vital & intimate – a fact that is basic to the doctrine of the Church & this principle of her union with Christ. Believers are not somehow or other attached to Christ but are joined to Him in this living & organic union which is brought about by the new birth. 1 Cor 12: 12, 13 – in v.12 Paul makes use of the analogy of the human body, stressing that while it is comprised of various parts, it is one. He says – “*so also is Christ.*” This is striking – he is speaking of the Church as the body, but he says “*so also is Christ.*” The point is clear: so real, so living & vital is the union between Christ the Head and the Church the body that when Apostle speaks of one he speaks of both. Then in v.13 he proceeds to show how this living union is formed by the supernatural power of the Spirit by this spiritual baptism by which sinners are brought into this one body of which Christ is head. What a demonstration of the exceeding greatness of God’s power! Christ & the Church, the Head & the Body in this vital, living, spiritual union because of the supernatural work of the Spirit.

2. Then, this union between Christ and the Church is permanent.

From this analogy of the head & the body we are taught that union with Christ is permanent & indissoluble. The connection in the human anatomy between head & body is not something that may exist today but not tomorrow; the union is not some hap-hazard, spasmodic matter. Such a suggestion & situation would be absurd & grotesque. Therefore, because the Spirit uses the analogy of the union between head & body, He is teaching that the believer does not pass in and out of the body of Christ or in and out of union with Christ. It is a permanent union.

Union with Christ is permanent because it is the result of “*the working of His mighty power...*” – the mighty power of the Holy Spirit. See 1 Pet 1: 3-5 – v.3 teaches the truth of the new birth bringing believers into the experience of a living hope in Christ; and v.v.3, 4 present the certain prospect of enjoying our eternal inheritance due to being kept by the power of God until the great day of final deliverance. The union, therefore, is permanent.

II. THE SECOND PRINCIPLE IS THAT OF CHRIST BEING THE SOURCE OF LIFE TO THE CHURCH

Note the words in v.22 that state that God gave Christ “*to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body.*” The point that Paul makes in this statement is that Christ is the head of the church, not in the sense of being her authority (though He is, as is taught elsewhere), but in the sense of being the source of her spiritual life.

Again this fact is made clear by the analogy employed by the Apostle: in the human frame the head is the source of the energy that flows through the body. The life in every part of the body is conveyed as the result of the functioning of the nervous system, and the nervous system can be traced back to the brain or the head. The head is the source and centre which controls the nervous energy in every separate part & particle of the whole body. Thus, in the sense in which Paul here says that Christ is head of the body, he means that Christ is the source of the Church’s life. Believers have no spiritual life independent of Christ, John 15: 5.

1. Therefore, Christ fills the body, the Church, with His own life.

Notice the words in v.23 – “*The fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*” There is a fulness of spiritual life in Christ, John 1: 16. Every spiritual grace, quality, and gift is found in Christ in an infinite & inexhaustible fulness, constituting the spiritual life that His Church needs. Moreover, that fulness of life “*filleth all in all...*” i.e. it extends to the entire body of believers, 2 Pet 2: 4.

It is important that every believer recognises this truth & lives in the enjoyment of it in order to function within the body as a member in particular and as a part of the whole. 1 Cor 12: 27 – “*Ye are the body of Christ and members in particular.*” Just as it is in the human body, so it is in the spiritual: there are many members, each with its own role but all contributing to the proper functioning of the whole body. But the energy & power we exercise all comes from Christ the Head, Eph 4: 15, 16.

Thus, all believers, in the midst of the spiritual battle in which we are engaged are to live in total dependence on Christ, who fills all of His people. Focus on your union with Christ & recognise that His life is in you by virtue of your union with Him. See that you are inseparably joined to the source & centre of all spiritual life and draw that life from Him, Col 2: 19.

2. Thus, since Christ is the source of life to the whole body it is given unity.

In the human body all the parts are bound together by the same life that courses through them. No part of the human body has an independent existence, and the same is true of Christ’s body, the Church. The spiritual life or energy that extends to & courses through the entire body of Christ is that of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to be in the body of Christ & not have the Spirit dwelling within, Rom 8: 9, 14 & 15. See also Eph 4: 1-14a – note especially that Paul’s call to unity among Christians is this: “*There is one body and one Spirit.*” The point is that the Holy Spirit indwelling the entire body of believers in all its members and imparting to them the life of Christ their Head joins them together. The Spirit constitutes, sustains & maintains the unity of the body of Christ. Moreover, as the Spirit of truth – the truth as we have it in all Scripture – the unity He creates results from & upon the truth. Hence, the ecumenical unity that prevails today is false for it can only exist through rejection of truth.

III. THE THIRD PRINCIPLE IS THAT THE CHURCH IS CHRIST’S FULNESS

Note these words – “*The church, which is His body, the fulness of Him.*” We have just noted that Christ’s life fills the body of believers. But it is also said here that the Church or the Body is Christ’s fulness – i.e. Christ as the Head would not be complete without the Body. Physically, a head alone is not complete; and in the spiritual realm Christ as the Mediatorial Head must have His body. Thus, throughout time that Body has been growing and will one day be complete. But now see yourself as one of those who make up Christ’s fulness – live in that truth!