

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

5th March 2006

Read: Ephesians 4: 1-16

Text: v.12

The Body of Christ Edified

Paul's favourite description of the Christian Church is his presentation of her under the metaphor of "*the body*." In the verses read today he uses this metaphor four times; and as we have noted in recent messages, he employs this metaphor quite frequently in some of his other epistles.

It is easy to detect the wisdom & relevance of the Apostle's use of this particular metaphor in connection with his teaching on the headship of Christ over His Church. Christ is Head of all things in the entire universe. But He is Head of the Church in a special sense. He is her head as her Mediator and Saviour; as He acts on her behalf in the entire scope of His redemptive work for her. Therefore, as her Mediatorial Head it is fitting that the Church should be called *His body*. As Head, Christ must have a body. To refer to Him as the Head in the context of redemption would be meaningless unless the figure is carried through, with those whom He redeems and rules being called *His body* and being treated by Him as such.

Our study also had us focus on the body or the church being "His fulness" as is stated at the end of Eph 1. The words denote that the Church is the complement of Christ in terms of being the special object of His love, as well as being His instrument for the execution of His will in this world. He as the Head & the Church as the body are joined together as one, with all believers being the members of his mystical & spiritual body. In that body there are two chief features – unity & diversity; i.e. one body but many members, each with its own position & ability. Thus, as these features of unity & diversity are understood and valued by God's people, the body of Christ will function as it should to the glory and honour of its living Head.

However, for the body to function as it should under these features of unity & diversity there must be the edifying of that body; and this is essentially the theme that is set before us in our text today and in the context where it lies. Note the words – "*the edifying of the body of Christ*." The word "edifying" literally means *to build a house*; but the sense of it in this & similar texts is that of promoting spiritual growth and the development of spiritual character among believers. Therefore, the edification of the body of Christ is the company of the saints growing and maturing in the things that pertain to life and godliness.

This reference to the edifying of the body lies against the backdrop of Paul's reference to Christ the Head of the Church having accomplished redemption, having ascended up into glory in triumph and out of that victory dispensing gifts to the Church, v.8. Thus, note v.11 – these are just a few examples of the gifts that Christ has given to the Church. Some of them were temporary, such as *apostles and prophets*, for the N.T. reveals that these offices were for the Apostolic era only. Then, the *evangelist* is mentioned. Acts 21: 8 refers to "*Philip the evangelist*." The term would refer to the one who laboured along with the apostles in the development and spread of the early church. But then the word is used again of Timothy in 2 Tim 4: 5 – "*do the work of an evangelist*." This is addressed to one who was pastor of the church at Ephesus, to a Gospel minister therefore. In that sense, every minister worthy of the position will seek to evangelise. Then it is actually the Gospel minister who is in view in the latter part of v.11 in the words "*pastors and teachers*." In the original text the language indicates that there is just one office or position in view, for the text actually reads "*the pastor/teacher*." This is the permanent office with regard to the edifying of Christ's body through the labour of preaching & teaching. The same position is in view in 1 Tim 5: 17 where Paul makes a distinction among the elders of the Church placing emphasis on those who "*labour in the word and doctrine*."

However, as v.12 shows the vital matter is that Christ gave these offices, whether temporary or permanent, in order to the spiritual edification of His body, the Church. This verse is well summed up in the words of Dr. Charles Hodge in his Commentary on Ephesians – "*For the sake of perfecting the saints, Christ appointed these officers to the work of the ministry, to the edifying of His body*." Consequently, the main focus in this text is on the edifying of the spiritual body of Christ, so that the body will be enabled to function as Christ would desire & to His glory. Today, therefore, I wish to consider with you a number of points with respect to the edification of the body of Christ, points that are found in these verses that are inseparably attached to our text.

I. THE FIRST POINT IS TO NOTE THAT THE SOURCE OF THIS EDIFICATION IS CHRIST HIMSELF

Connect the closing words of v.15 with the great statement in v.16 and it will be plainly seen that Christ is the source of the edification that the body requires & must receive. Thus, from Christ the Head, the entire body receives the edification that is needed for spiritual growth & development. V.16 then describes the actual edifying of the body itself; but this is one of the most complex statements that Paul ever wrote, thus must be broken down into its various parts in order to grasp its meaning.

1. **There is the spiritual life itself** – note the words "*that which every joint supplieth*." The words "that which" refer to the spiritual life that comes from the Head, even Christ. See the parallel verse, Col 2: 19 & note the reference "having nourishment ministered." This *nourishment* is obviously a reference to this spiritual life that is supplied by Christ; and the reference is really to the Holy Spirit & the life He imparts. See Gal 3: 5 where the word *ministereth* is essentially the same word. To believers, therefore, there is the constant supply of the Spirit, Phil 1: 19 – again the same word is used. Thus, from Christ the Head there is a constant supply of the Spirit to the Body.

2. **Every part of the body receives this spiritual life** – note the words “*according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.*” ‘Every part’ = every part or member of Christ’s body. ‘The measure of every part’ = the capacity of every part or member. ‘According to the effectual working’ = the life or energy that operates in each part. Thus, put together the words signify that each believer receives the particular amount of spiritual life that is in keeping with the role that he or she fulfils within the body of Christ.

3. **This supply of spiritual life to every part unifies the whole body** – “*the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth.*” The words ‘fitly joined together’ denote the idea of all the members of Christ’s body fitting together & into one another, just as it is in the human body. The word ‘compacted’ means *closely knit or brought and held together*. The word denotes concord, sympathy & unity. Thus, as the life of Christ, the spiritual life of the Spirit flows to every believer the whole body of Christ is knit together.

4. **The outcome of all this is increase or edification** – note the final words of v.16: “*maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*” This statement refers right back to v.12 – “*the edifying of the body of Christ.*” The body of Christ growing, developing, being edified by the supply of the Spirit to every part, knitting the body together & bringing God’s people onwards & forwards in spiritual life. *Therefore, how dependent we are on the Head and the supply of the Spirit He gives!* Pray much for this supply of the life of the Spirit; and strive much against all that will grieve and quench Him, Eph 4: 30 & 1 Thess 5: 19.

II. IN THE SECOND PLACE LET US NOTE THE SIGNS OF THIS EDIFICATION

When the Church or the body of Christ is enjoying this edification there will be particular signs of it. Moreover, those signs of edification are set before us in this passage. Note them.

1. **Conformity to the image of Christ.** See v.15 – “*May grow up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ.*” These words plainly refer to the body developing in a spiritual way in such a fashion that it results in conformity to Christ the Head; likeness to His image. This is the eternal purpose of the Lord for His people, Rom 8: 29. Thus, one day it will be fully and finally realised in the believer as a complete person, soul & body, Heb 12: 23 & Phil 3: 21. But this conformity to Christ’s image begins here in time as a result of the new birth & the entire work of grace & sanctification. See 2 Cor 3: 18 – the words “*are changed into the same image...*” actually read “*are being changed into the same image.*” This is a conformation that goes on constantly in the believer.

Here in Eph 4: 15 the conformity is especially to Christ as Head. Every member of the body should be worthy of the Head, should correspond to the pattern & standard of the Head. Thus, there is something particular here – there should be no clash with the Head, no lack of correspondence to Christ the Head in the sense of **control**. As Head, Christ is marked by perfect control. Thus, the believer is to have a life that is marked by control; the control of the Spirit of God not the control of the flesh, Eph 5: 18.

2. **Then there is maturity.** Again taking v.15, focus on the words “*grow up into Him in all things.*” The thought here is clearly that of spiritual maturity & development – growing up! Notice that it is “*in all things.*” Here, once more, is the thought of balance in the Christian life. The believer growing symmetrically – in every facet of the Christian life; in every spiritual grace; in every spiritual gift the Lord gives. See 2 Thess 1: 3, 4 – faith, love, patience were all growing & developing together in great measure in the Thessalonians. Do you sense that you are growing in these qualities? Do you believe more, love more, and understand more, than you did at some past time? Is the command of 2 Pet 3: 18 coming more and more into fruition in your life?

Note the following verses that define something of this maturity. 1 Cor 14: 20 – malice should be less & less evident in our lives but with respect to understanding there should be maturity. Rom 16: 19 – “*simple concerning evil.*” That is – be like a child concerning evil. Just as a little child does not understand the evil of the world but has an innocence concerning it, let us be like this. But concerning that which is good, spiritual, and wholesome, be wise – that is, accumulate all the wisdom you can in that area.

3. **In addition there is stability.** See v.14 – the word for “children” means *infants*. The thought here is that Paul is referring to the beginning of the Christian life, but he urges that we move on for he says – “*that we henceforth be no more children.*” The reference to children signifies the matter of the new birth, the beginning of the Christian life. But we are to move on from there – no more, no longer, children. Stability must come & mark our lives.

Thus, the main part of this verse describes *instability*; and there is a great deal of instability among so many believers for the simple reason that edification is not taking place in their lives. Many are tossed to and fro like a ball on a wave; blown about by every novelty that arises & are often swept away by deceit, craft and false teaching. Stability is vital, but stability will only come as you subject yourself to that which edifies, which is mainly truth, v.15a – it is as the truth is spoken and imbibed that edification will come.

III. FINALLY THERE IS THE SEQUEL TO THIS EDIFICATION

See v.13 – this verse actually describes the ultimate outcome of the edifying of the body of Christ, which is the Church being brought to her state of perfection and full likeness to Christ, Eph 5: 25-27. What this verse describes will never be seen in this world, only in the world to come. But since this is the sequel to the edifying of the body of Christ, then it presupposes that there should be a diligent use of all the means of grace that the Lord has provided to that end – the Word, the sacraments and prayer. Let us subject ourselves to and employ these means of grace and be edified thereby.