

Sermon – 31/08/2008 am

Building the Body

Study Text: Ephesians 4:12

The games are over and the medals all awarded. Some achieved beyond their expectations while others were disappointed with their performance. All who competed in the games went into strict training in the hope of getting a medal. One cyclist came out of hospital to start her training program, a program devised to have her in peak condition on the day of the big race.

She, like all other athletes at the games, had a coach who prepared her for the race. The important role played by coaches was revealed in these recent games. The Chinese and British invested lots in getting top coaches to train their athletes. Most medal winners said they would not have got there without their coach. Coaches do not compete but they equip the athletes to go on and win a medal.

Equip

All believers have been given the Holy Spirit. All believers should demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit in their life. All believers have a special gift of the Spirit for use in the body of Christ, the church. There is a variety of these spiritual gifts, some more important than others but all essential to the functioning and growth of the body.

Gifts of the word are especially important for the word of God is fundamental to the exercise of all gifts. These gifts, remember, are not natural gifts or talents that we use for our own well-being or pleasure but are Christ's gifts to the church.

Apostles and prophets are gifted to speak the word. The twelve apostles would not *leave the word of God to serve at tables* (Acts 6:2). Paul told Timothy to preach the word, for the time would come when people would not endure sound doctrine (II Timothy 4:2-3). Gifts of the word were given to these men for the foundation of the church, for the establishment of truth and sound doctrine in the church. We have this doctrine in the canon of Scripture. Pastors and teachers also have 'word' gifts as those who expound the Scriptures. Those who labour in word and doctrine are to be accorded double honour (I Timothy 5:17).

The ministry of the word is essential if the church is to function and grow up into maturity in Jesus Christ. False teachers, men and women speaking misleading words, are a threat to the church (Acts 20:29). Paul had to confront the false teaching of Judaizers when they taught that circumcision and obedience to the Law was essential to salvation. Then there were Hymenaeus and Philetus who strayed from the truth with regard to the resurrection – their message spread like cancer in the church (II Timothy 2:18). John sent letters to the churches in Asia Minor warning about false teachers like Jezebel. She called herself a prophetess and taught compromise with the world (Revelation 2:20).

False teaching continues to threaten the church today. Some are adding to the word of God while others are taking from it. There are teachers who do not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus or in the miracles which he worked. To satisfy humanists and scientists they teach that

such doctrines are not essential to the gospel. Other teachers do not hold to what the Bible teaches about creation and the sovereignty of God.

If the Scriptures are corrupted in such ways the whole foundation of the church is weakened. It is like using bricks that are half backed or mortar without cement. When the Bible is not longer held as the inspired and infallible word of God what is there left to build on? Preachers start expounding from the poets and philosophers. I once heard a sermon that was all about a stained glass window – thankfully it was short. Of what use to troubled souls are the words of other troubled souls?

The ministry of the pastor and teacher is to equip the saints or believers for the work of ministry (4:12). Paul was a minister of the gospel (3:7) and the saints had a work of ministry. All believers have a ministry. Ministry is exercising your spiritual gift in the body of Christ.

Just how we are to read verse twelve is a matter of debate. You will notice the word ‘for’ occurs three times, giving three phrases. But how are these related. In the Greek the first ‘for’ is not the same as the other two so the three phrases are not three different outcomes from the ministry. Is there just one outcome then? In a sense yes, but we have two steps in reaching this outcome. The punctuation in the NKJ and NIV points to these two steps. The ‘word gifts’ are for the equipping of believers in the work of ministry so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Equipping is an interesting word, a word found only here as a noun. In Matthew 4:21 it refers to the disciples mending their nets in preparation for a night of fishing. In Galatians 6:1 it refers to restoring a brother who has fallen into sin. The translation perfecting is found in the KJV. It refers to ‘the bringing of the saints to a condition of fitness for the discharge of their functions in the body’.

The female cyclist was injured and needed to get to medical help and counsel to get better. Not all cyclists had injuries but all had to go into training for the Olympics. They had to be coached; they had to be equipped physically and mentally for the big day. Some believers need restoration. All need equipping for the work of ministry, for the task of exercising their gift in the church. We need to be equipped with a sound knowledge of doctrine if we are to keep on ministering till the end.

In the infant church at Jerusalem a need arose with regard to the widows. The apostles told the church to choose seven men with spiritual gifts suited to the task. Did they choose chefs or financial managers? They chose men of good reputation. Men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. This was not a worldly task but a task in the church of God.

Doctors or nurses called to the mission field are usually told to study at a Bible college for a year. For someone to share the gospel they must first know what they believe. In any ministry a sound knowledge of the word of God is a must, as is an outworking of this knowledge in an upright life.

In the Jerusalem church a need arose and men with the appropriate spiritual gift were appointed to the task. It is the same today. As needs arise in the church you may be asked to use your gift in fulfilling that need. It may only be a small task but every task is important in the church, which is the body of Christ. If you think you have a spiritual gift you could use in the church then humbly share your concern. The elders will listen and give advice according

to the word of God. But do not come saying I want to do this or that in the church and I want to do it my way without any help or interference.

Edify

Christ's gifts to us are for the building up of the body of Christ. To edify literally means to 'house build'. The church is pictured as a body with many diverse parts all acting together under the direction of the head. Without just one part, even a little finger or toe, the body will not function perfectly – not to mention if it is missing a thumb or big toe. Each part of the body must be cared for and kept in shape. You do not see an athlete exercising just one leg or one arm. The whole body must be kept fit and active. So it is in the church. Each member has a part to play and must play that part for the church to grow and be strong.

The church is also pictured as a building, a holy temple (2:21). It is a building under construction, a building being fitted together. Every part, every nut and bolt, is essential to the building. Many parts of a building we do not see, but if they are overlooked as unimportant the whole thing will collapse.

How do we see a church being built up? How do we see any building being built up? The foundation must be there, solid and sound. The only foundation for the church is that laid by the apostles and prophets. We must not depart from their teaching. *No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:11). The building rises from this foundation – or should! What use is a foundation and some scaffolding?

Take care how you build. What use is it if one builds with gold and another with straw? We are not building our own castle, we are not building an edifice for our own glory; we are building the holy temple of the Lord. We must be united. We must be committed, committed to Christ, and in him to one another.

There is no mention in this passage of numbers, though there is always rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. To repent they must hear the gospel, the word of God. *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?* (Romans 10:14) This is the task of the church. This is the building up of the body of Christ.

The emphasis in this passage is on unity and harmony, on equipping and exercising the gifts of the Spirit. A body being fed and functioning according to Scripture will grow up into Christ the head and the Lord will add to that body those who are being saved.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon