

Sermon – 14/09/2008 am

Mature in Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 4:13

Do you like babies? What do you like about them? Babies have such little hands and feet. Their fingers are so tiny compared to those of an adult. A babies head by contrast is relatively large. Its head will grow with age but not nearly as much as the rest of its body. It is as if its body has to grow in order to match its head.

The church, founded on the teaching of the apostles and prophets, is being built up as each member engages in the ministry given to them. The ministry of the word is fundamental to the equipping of each believer for the use of their gift in the church. In this passage Paul continues with this theme, describing the goal of all ministry – *till we all come to...or till we all arrive at...*

The importance of the word of God in equipping saints for the ministry cannot be overemphasised. Did you see the recent survey showing that only 20-30% of churchgoers read their Bible daily? Are you surprised at such a finding? How can a child grow if they do not eat? How can a Christian grow without spiritual food? Clearly many are not growing? Clearly the body of Christ is stunted; it is immature for lack of feeding on the word of God. When people hunger and thirst for their Saviour and Lord, they read their Bibles daily. Feeding on the word they grow in faith, in love and in knowledge of Jesus Christ.

What does Paul see as the goal of ministry in the body of Christ? Where does he envisage us arriving? He points out three things in this passage – unity of the faith, knowledge of the Son of God and the perfect/complete man.

Unity of the Faith

Paul began this chapter urging the believers to love one another and to be united in Christ. There is *one Lord and one faith* (4:5). The one faith is faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I sometimes add the word 'Nazareth' to remind us that Jesus is an historical person who walked on this earth. Faith means faith in this Jesus, the Jesus revealed in Scripture. We do not have faith in some mystical person, some person of our own imagination. The tragedy is that such a person arises in the church when people do not read their Bible – which is of course idolatry.

Some read this text as 'unity of faith in the Son of God'; they take 'Son of God' as belonging to both statements. There is only one basis of unity in the church and that is Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God, Jesus Christ who is fully man and fully God. There are some churches which do not believe this. We cannot have unity with such people.

On the other hand there are churches that think of unity in terms of their ethnicity or heritage, their creed or confessions, or their mode of worship. Such thinking means division, not unity. The unity Paul writes of is that of faith in Jesus Christ. It is a unity of the Spirit and also of the Father (4:3, 6). Faith in Jesus means belief in the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Knowledge of the Son of God

Faith is vitally connected to knowledge. Some speak about blind faith as if faith is contrary to knowledge. But there is nothing blind about faith in Jesus. Faith is based fully and finally upon our knowledge of Jesus as revealed in the Bible. All that we know about Jesus is found in the Bible – and so it will remain until he comes again. The teacher and the student learn from this same book. If we stick to this revealed word our faith will be based in the truth and it will be in the same person.

Knowledge is essential to faith. *How can they believe in him of whom they have not heard* (Romans 10:14)? Faith in Jesus is impossible without knowledge of him – and that knowledge is found only in the Bible. Knowledge sufficient for faith is not complete knowledge. Faith brings us into a relationship with Jesus, a relationship that grows as our knowledge of him grows.

Does anyone know their husband or wife completely when they get married? Marriage begins on the wedding day but does it end there? Surely not! But some Christians do not know Christ much better than they did on the day they believed. They have not sought to know him better, the one who loved them and died for them.

Knowledge is essential to any relationship, knowledge of the one who loves us and the one we love. We can know Jesus better than any human being because he has revealed himself so wonderfully in the Bible. How well do you know Jesus? You do want to spend the rest of your life and eternity with him don't you?

The apostle Paul was eager to know more of Christ every day. He wrote *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection* (Philippians 3:10). He wrote this after years of serving Christ. He never came to know Christ in all his fullness, and neither will you. But he pressed on with all his mind and heart to know more of Christ his Lord. Are you striving with all your mind and heart to know more of Christ your Saviour and Lord, or are you satisfied with what you already know?

Knowledge of Jesus Christ comes in the context of fellowship in the church. If you are seeking to know him in some glorious isolation you will not understand half of what he reveals. Jesus was in constant fellowship with his Father. He speaks about our fellowship with the Father and with each other – 'love the Lord your God and love one another' he commands. 'Love one another as I have loved you' he said (John 13:34). Such commands have no meaning if you consider your faith and knowledge to be completely independent of fellow believers. It is in the church, in the body of Christ, that we grow up into maturity in Christ.

Complete Man

The Son of Man and the Son of God. Jesus is the perfect man, the only perfect man. Adam sinned against God, and everyone born of Adam is born in sin. Only Jesus, the Son of God, is perfect and without sin. Only Jesus reaches to the stature of what man should be. Jesus is the measure of a man.

Many compare themselves with other people and conclude they are not too bad. Let them try comparing themselves with Jesus.

The more we grow in our knowledge of Christ, the more time we spend with him in prayer and worship the more we will become like him. The goal of our faith is to be like Christ (I Timothy 3:2).

The question for discussion on the radio recently was ‘do women choose a husband who is like their father’ – it arose from yet another study or survey of human behaviour. But in the course of the discussion one caller commented how amazing it is that a husband and wife can become so much alike. Being together so much of the time they develop certain likenesses. Maybe the husband becomes like his father-in-law because he is living with the father's daughter! Clearly in living with a person you become like them in certain ways.

Till we all come to...a perfect/complete man. What does this mean? ‘Complete’ is a better translation than ‘perfect’ here as it refers maturity, to being fully-grown. ‘Man’ is used in the sense of ‘adult’. All the words in this verse speak of maturity. They speak of maturity primarily in the body of Christ, not as individuals. The picture is of the church growing and maturing to the glory of God.

Christ is the head of the body. He is the measure of completion. In Christ dwells the fullness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9). That fullness of Christ overflows into the whole body and fills the whole body so that we are complete in him.

Just as the child's body grows to match its head, so we in the church are to grow up to the measure of Christ; we are to grow up into Christ who is the head (4:15). As we worship and minister together we see each part of the body growing – the tiny fingers and hands, the toes and the feet and every part grows until the whole body reaches adulthood.

Each part only grows as it remains part of the body and as it remains connected to the head. Each part is fed by the life-giving blood flowing through the veins. Each part is controlled by the nervous system connected to the head. This is the picture we have for growth in the church, growth in unity and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.

Till we all come to complete adulthood. Note the ‘all’ in this verse and the word ‘unity’. We should all be growing together. We should be ministering together under the headship of Christ. Are you growing in your faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ? If not, why not? As you hear the word of God today is it sinking into your mind and heart? Remember the goal of your faith – to be like Christ. Remember also you who are strong, to help the weak. Remember the whole body must grow not just part of it.

‘If as God's people we are together exposed to the same sanctifying truth on a regular basis, our minds and our thinking, our wills and desires, would be recalibrated to the mind and will of God’.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon