

## 223 A Very Good Thing! – 4

The “Church” means PEOPLE! – ordinary people of all ages and backgrounds, countries and racial groups, who are drawn together and held together by their shared faith in the one great, single, central Truth of this universe – that “Jesus Christ is Lord”. This Church is termed “the body of Christ”, with Christ at its Head, and all its members comprising the “body” (eg., Ephesians 2.17-23).

As the human body consists of numerous, necessary, interdependent parts, just so with the Church – every member playing their part, pulling their weight, exercising their God-given gifts for the building-up of the body in terms of its spiritual health and growth. Fortunately for us who come after, the church at Corinth in its early days had much to learn about these things, prompting the Holy Spirit through Paul to give practical instruction as to how any local church community should operate, words recorded for us in I Corinthians Chapters 11-14 that remain central for church life today.

We read first a rather confusing passage about head-covering during worship (11.1-16) which concerns the broader theme of “spiritual headship”, a theme much misunderstood these days and often set aside. Space prevents our exploring this theme properly here, but taken alongside other Scriptures (egs., Genesis 3 / Luke 6.13-16 and parallels / Ephesians 5.20-33 / Colossians 3.16-19 / I Corinthians 14.33-36 / I Timothy 2.1-3.13), we see the Holy Spirit explaining that there are God-implanted, spiritual responsibilities which differ between man and woman and which need to be honoured in the church and family. We can note here that these carefully-balanced differences are clearly given by the Lord for our mutual blessing.

I Corinthians 11.17-34 concerns the need for our thoughtfulness towards one another – hopefully no surprise for us these days but a reminder that at the start such behaviour was seriously new! In Chapter 12 the Holy Spirit tells us through Paul of His allocation of spiritual gifts. There are many such gifts (a few examples are given in vv 4-10), and every church member is entrusted with such gifts by the Holy Spirit as He decides (v 11).

These gifts are to be used properly, and have nothing to do with bragging rights or cliqueness. For what, in reality, is a church member who may have a long list of spiritual gifts and good deeds, yet who lacks the one vital quality of love? That person is just a horrible, clashing din! – who is “nothing” and who gains “nothing” (13.1-3). Instead, love is to be central (13.4-13), with opportunities given in the assembly for the gifts to be used as intended (12.12-31). In Chapter 14 a specific matter which the Corinthian Christians were getting very wrong is dealt with in detail, (namely the proper use of tongues and prophecy within corporate worship,

a question still relevant today in various parts of the Church). The passage highlights some features that should be present in all our worship – a sense of peace, decency and order as the Lord is honoured and the people are edified (vv 26, 33 and 40).

So from the Scriptures that we have explored last time and this time the Lord has given clear guidance as to how Christian gatherings are to function. We meet to worship Almighty God; to confess our sins together and receive the Father's fresh forgiveness through His Son; to hear the Word of God read, explained and applied; to pray; and to support one another, (many of the former Weekly Reflections under the Practical Discipleship theme deal with what this support involves in practice). The Lord surely wishes that every member of the body should leave the assembly having been blessed - blessed from the encounter with God Himself, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and blessed from the encounter with God's people, our fellow Christians.

Put like this, our gathering together with fellow believers in Christ is confirmed as being a "Very Good Thing"! Next time God willing we can tackle the question of how we decide which local church is the right one for "me" or "us" – quite tricky these days with such a variety on offer. But wherever we place ourselves the basics remain the same, to build each other up in the body of Christ, and, at the heart, to ensure that the Lord, rather than anyone else or anything else, receives all the glory.

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