

481 Fellowship, Support and Blessing

In view of Russia's invasion of Ukraine our recent Weekly Reflections have concentrated on our need to keep putting the Lord first in our lives, so as to keep dangers, threats and temptations in their true, lesser, perspective. Last week we concentrated on our dealing with temptations effectively – recognise them, resist them, retreat from them and resolve to avoid them when possible in the future. Truly, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptations ...” (II Peter 2.9a).

How much easier it is to keep the Lord “top of the list” in our lives, and to see off temptations when they come our way, when we are living our Christian lives both in accordance with Scripture and in meaningful fellowship with other like-minded Christians. The notion we hear sometimes, “You don't have to go to church to be a Christian”, while being strictly true in itself, is never going to produce a strong Christian who is giving to, and receiving from, fellow Christians in a Bible-honouring local fellowship. For we are in this together, needing both God's Word and each other.

Regarding our need for God's Word, “All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works ... For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (II Timothy 3.16-17 / Romans 15.4, KJV).

And regarding our need for one another, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ... For the body is not one member but many ... if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I Corinthians 1.9;12.14 / I John 1.7)

Not surprisingly therefore, treating one another properly is rather important! – as some verses in Romans Chapter 15 emphasise. We are told to follow Christ's example by pleasing one another before pleasing ourselves (vv.1-3). Part of this pleasing involves our bearing “the infirmities of the weak” (v.1), that is, by our remembering that we are all at different spiritual ages and none of us is yet “perfect” (that word ‘telos’ in the Greek), meaning “complete” or “arrived”, or “entirely as the Lord would have us be”. We are therefore to follow the Lord's example of being patient and comforting with one another, that then “we may with

one mind [and] one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (from vv. 5-6). May we “receive one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God” (v.7), ignoring any differences of ethnicity or wealth and so on. Each member of the local “body of Christ” belongs, is unique in terms of character and gifts, and is needed for the well-being of the whole (eg., I Corinthians Chapter 12).

Paul, inspired of the Holy Spirit, writes – “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Romans 15.13). That is a fine description of a local fellowship that is getting things right! – a fellowship of joy, peace and hope, all flowing from a settled belief in the truth of God’s Word and in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The members of such a fellowship will be “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another” (from v.14).

This “admonishing” (defined as warning or reproof), is a necessary, but sensitive, part of Christian life together. If the admonishing is under-done, bad habits will creep in, damaging the individuals concerned as well as the fellowship as a whole and the effectiveness of its witnessing. On the other hand, admonishing can easily be over-done! - with everyone closely watching everyone else, and sidling up to “the offender” for “a quiet word” when felt necessary. Our remembering - “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23), including me therefore, can help to keep “the admonishing balance” about right.

We see how the Lord Jesus “admonished” when necessary: be that some cities for their lack of repentance, (Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, Matthew 11.20-24); or Pharisees and lawyers for their arrogance and spiritual obstructiveness (Luke 11.42-54); or individuals, such as Simon Peter, whose attitude was one of - “Leave it all with me Lord, I’ll keep you safe, I’ll never let you down!” (egs., Matthew 16.21-23 / Luke 22.31-34). But Peter did let His Lord down, yet His Lord still received him back (Mark 14.66-72 / John 21.15-17).

Thanks be to God, none of us is to live the Christian life alone. Each of us has a place within a local church family, for the giving and receiving of true fellowship, support and blessing.

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