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Our “getting on together” is a key requirement for all members of the Christian church, the “ekklesia”, the called-out ones, the saints, the mystical “body of Christ” in the world. Last time we used a simple picture of circles and hexagons, showing our need to give each other space, space to be themselves in our mutual “abiding in Christ” (John 15.1-8), and space to employ their particular God-given gifts for the well-being of others, without jostle or competition. At present this “space-giving” in many cases remains a goal rather than an established fact! - but it remains one of the worthy goals to be aimed for.

In Ephesians 4.11-16, through Paul the Holy Spirit gives us some precious teaching on these matters. First is the bestowing of what can be termed “grace-gifts” within the body of Christ, which include in this particular text the presence of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers” (4.11, KJV). Other such gifts are mentioned for example in Romans 12.6-8 and I Corinthians 12.4-11, so in any local “ekklesia” we can assume that every member present has one or more Spirit-given gifts, which need to be identified and allowed to function properly. Some members have been given “up-front” leadership roles, with particular accountability as a result (eg., Luke 12.48mid), while others have gifts less in the public eye but which are no less needed – “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4.12). In each local Christian fellowship, the wonder is that each member belongs within it by his or her faith in Christ; is unique within it due to their character and gifts; and is necessary within it, each playing their part, be that noticed or scarce-noticed, for the benefit of all.

So the basic scene has been established by Christ through the Holy Spirit: His Church consists of numerous groups of local Christian saints, who belong to one another by their shared faith in Christ and by their shared membership of His body, and who possess within their midst all the spiritual gifts they need to function effectively. What is to happen next?!

The “happening-next” is a steady journey with a clearly-defined destination, as given to us in Ephesians 4.12. Here is a literal translation of the verse, broken into its phrases: a) “until we all may come” – all the saints, not just some of them; b) “to the unity (i) of the faith” – many differences of character and gifts exist, but there is to be a solid oneness in terms of the acceptance of the central Gospel truths; c) “and

(implied, to the unity) (ii) of the full knowledge of the Son of God” – a deep heart-knowledge of personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, thoroughly grounded in Scripture and experience, and possessed by all; d) “to a full-grown man” – the Greek word translated here as “full-grown” is that word “telos”, which is all about completeness, finishedness, arrival-ness; e) “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” – the Greek word translated “fullness” here meaning an abundance, a full-to-bursting, a spilling-over-the-brim.

Such a local ekklesia will not only have reached its maximum effectiveness, to the glory of God in Christ, but will have left far behind old failings and mistakes: “so that by then we may no longer be infants, being blown and carried about by every wind of doctrine, to the trickery of men, in craftiness to the deceit of error ...” (4.14, Literal). Such an “arrived” ekklesia will be able reliably to distinguish Truth from Falsehood, (how very topical in these days of debate within the church denominations over homosexuality and gender issues for instance), “but speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in to Him in all things, who is the Head, the Christ ...” (v.15). There is thus a doctrinal settledness in a mature ekklesia, with a willingness to speak scriptural truths into any situation out of loving concern, whatever may be the reaction of the hearers to such scriptural truths (egs., Acts 2.29-40; 4.1-22; 5.29-33).

Finally in Ephesians 4.16 we are given a beautiful description of the intricate relationship between the Head and the body. From Christ: a) “all the body, being fitted and compacted together through every assisting bond”; b) “according to (the) effectual working of one measure (in) each part”; c) “producing the growth of the body” (that is, spiritually and numerically); d) “to the building up of itself in love” (Literal). Just as in a physical head and body, “the body of Christ” under its Head, Christ Himself, functions in robust health when each of its numerous small parts is rightly using their gifts, pulling their weight, and playing their part.

In Ephesians 5.25-27 we read that Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for it ... that He might sanctify and cleanse it ... that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle ... but that it should be holy and without blemish” (KJV).

There is the desire of our Head, so there is the goal of His body.

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