

Glorifying God in the Church – The Roles in the Church

Ephesians 4:11-16 *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Sometimes I am asked what I do for a living, and sometimes I will answer with the statement, "I'm in the ministry." Most people understand what that means, but it actually is a little misleading. Because in fact, every Christian in the world is "in the ministry". Every Christian is a minister, and has a ministry. In fact, the only way we end up with healthy churches, is when the members in each church realise this, and act like it. Healthy churches are made up of people who understand that every Christian has a role in the church.

We have considered the goal of the church. The goal to which Christ wants us to reach which will bring Him maximum glory is a place of unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, maturity, and conformity to Christ. In these verses we discover how the church grows itself into that goal. And Paul, in having picked the illustration of the body, is suggesting that the body wants to grow in this direction. It is natural for it to grow in this direction. It is what will happen unless it is unhealthy or injured.

The body is a mechanism that loves itself, you could say. It is self-protective, self-nourishing, self-edifying. A body wants to be healthy. So Paul is taking this idea of growth in verse 15 and 16. He wants to see local churches grow into the goal of verse 13. He wants to see them grow up **in all things, in every way**. And he is letting us know that this growth will happen unless we interrupt it or fail to play our part.

The body wants to grow itself, and will grow itself if three things are in place: the body must be connected to the head, the body parts must be present and participating, and every part must supply the body.

I. The Growing Body is Connected to the Head

... but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ -- ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Paul reminds us that the head of the church is Christ. The head is what we are seeking to grow up into. He is the mature and perfect head, we are the child's body trying to catch up with the head. The body will grow so long as it is connected to the head. If the body has a head, and is connected to the head, then it is alive, and ought to grow.

Humanly speaking, throughout history, one of the fastest ways of ending a human life was through decapitation. Remove the head, and the body dies. From the head, the brain and the top of the spinal cortex, the body is directed to grow and live and breathe. All the unconscious functions of your body, heart-beating, lungs breathing, food digesting happens because the head is directing the body. The only reason why a body grows is because

directions are coming from the head. The head is always the source of the body. That's where you take your air in. That's where you drink in your liquids. That's where you take in your food. Keep a body connected to its head, and it will grow. The head is the leader of the body and the source of the body. Who is the head of the church? Jesus Christ. As long as the church has Christ as its Lord and Source, it has all the potential to grow.

On the other hand, what happens to a church if its head is no longer Christ? What would you say about the health of a headless church? How might the church no longer have Christ as its head? Well, firstly, if the church loses the gospel. If the church believes that it lives through its own good works, or through its own ceremonies, or through its own traditions. At that point, the church is saying it does not require Christ and Christ alone to live. It is saying it has its own life. In that case it is a dead church. It is like the church at Sardis, to which Christ said:

Revelation 3:1 *"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead."*

But there could be a way that a gospel preaching church practically replaces Christ as head. It can make a popular pastor its head. It could look to a personality as its lord. It could act like it is independent of Christ, and rely on its programmes and popularity and numbers and budget. It could make decisions by checking market surveys, websites, trends, and comparing notes with other churches, but never consulting the Word of Christ for its decisions. In this way it would disregard the Lordship of Christ. It could also cease praying. It could never hold corporate prayer meetings or ask Christ for grace.

A church that fails to have Christ as its final authority and as its source, is a church which is sick. It is a body which is slowly being strangled by cutting itself off from the Authority and Power that comes from the head.

A Christ-centred church is a healthy church. He is always our Lord. His Word directs what we do and don't do. His will and pleasure are decisive. His power and enablement from the Holy Spirit are what we seek through prayer and humility and fasting. That's one of the reasons for the week of prayer and fasting this week. He is the goal and guide of what we do.

A church that stays connected to Christ as its head, through its belief in the gospel, its devotion to His will, its dependence on His power, is behaving naturally. It ought to grow. Growth is natural firstly, if we are connected to the head. But secondly, growth is natural if we are all present and participating.

II. The Growing Body's Parts Are Present and Participating

... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies...

Here is the second way that a church achieves its goal of unity, maturity and conformity to Christ. Paul says the whole body is joined and knit together by what every joint supplies. The words joined and knit are related words but they mean different things.

“Joined” means the way stones fit together exactly to make a building. Here it means how joints in a body fit completely together. The shoulder joint and the arm, upper and lower arms fitting at the elbow, the upper thighs and pelvis joining at the hip, upper and lower legs joining at the knee, foot and lower leg meeting at the ankle. Each joint perfectly fits together.

“Knit” means that the whole thing holds together, it is framed so as to be physically strong and firm. The joints in the body fit together perfectly, but in fitting together so well, it gives the whole body stability and firmness. The body does not collapse like a tent, or sag like a bag filled with water, or crumple down like pick-up sticks. The way the body parts are made for each other makes sure the body stays together.

Now what does this mean as far as the church goes? What is represented by the words *every joint*? Since Christ is the head, and we are the body, it must be a reference to every member. Every individual is like a body part.

So what is the Word saying about each person? Every member of a local church is important. Every member of a local church is part of a puzzle that only really works when all the pieces are there. You cannot take out the collar-bone, and expect the body to grow up into the head properly. You cannot remove the ankle bone, or one of the ligaments or the Achilles tendon, and not dramatically impair the body.

Paul makes it clear that the body grows itself because it is joined and knit together by what **every** joint supplies:

1 Corinthians 12:14-21 *or in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."*

As Paul puts it, the eye cannot claim it does not need the hand, nor can the head say it does not need the feet. All members of the body are necessary. In the same way, all members of a local church are necessary.

When Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution, it affected every branch of science. One of the areas of human biology that Darwinists tried to use to prove their theory was the idea of vestigial organs. A vestigial organ is a part of the body that apparently has no use or no function. Evolutionists claimed it was proof of evolution – something we used to use when we are monkeys, that we no longer use. And they had over 180 such things, including the wisdom teeth, the appendix, the tonsils, eyebrows, eyelashes, ear muscles, the coccyx that they thought were vestigial.

But in the many years since then, the almost unanimous opinion is that the so-called vestigial organs all have at least one function. God made man as He wanted to, without waste.

In the body of Christ, there are no vestigial organs. No one is unnecessary. And the idea here is the local church. God composes and puts together the local church with just the people needed at just the time needed. Everyone is needed.

The point – the body only grows when every member is present and participating. By present I don't only mean you are present for the services of the church. Of course it's vital that you do so. It's more than that. It means you're present in the life of this body beyond Sunday. Your

gifts and abilities are present. They are there to be felt by the other members of the body outside of Sunday. Just the fact they you are present and available and yielded to be used means you are fitting together in your place in the body, providing the whole thing with strength and stability.

But the key question is, what is that ministry that you are to have in the body? That's the third ingredient for a healthy body which grows towards unity, maturity and conformity to Christ.

III. The Growing Body is Supplied By Every Part's Ministry

... according to the effective working by which every part does its share...

The body grows not only when each part is present and available, but when every part does its share. When each part works; when each part actively does something, it causes the growth of the body. It is not enough that your lungs are present, your lungs must also be working. It is not enough that your rib cage be there, it must also perform its function. If any part of your body shuts down, what happens? The whole body feels it. Not only that, but the rest of your body has to work extra hard to make up for that shut-down.

The body of Christ is not one member, but many. And every member must not only be present in body life, but supplying what he or she was made to supply. Every member is a minister. That's what verse 12 says:

*... for the equipping of the **saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...***

Every believer is a minister, who is given the task of building up the body. Everyone is a minister; everyone has a ministry.

What does that look like? Well, the only phrase in verse 15 and 16 which would apply to every member, and would describe what ministry actually is, is at the beginning of verse 15:

Ephesians 4:15 *... speaking the truth in love...*

In the original language, this is actually a participle. If you wanted to translate it extremely literally, you would translate it 'truthing'. The body grows when it is connected to the head, when each member is present and yielded, and when every member does his or her share by lovingly 'truthing' the others. Your role as a believer in the church is to love the other believers and 'truth' them. You are to find ways to speak truth in loving ways, and love them in the truth.

What does it mean to truth one another? Very simply, it is when we, believers, speak the truth about God, about ourselves and about the world, to one another. Where is truth found? Scripture. So what happens is that every member finds ways to pass on and speak the truth of God's Word, in small and big ways, in simple and complex ways in creative and ordinary ways to each other.

Let me show you some Scriptural examples:

Ephesians 5:18-20 *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Ephesians 6:4 *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*

Colossians 3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

Romans 15:14 ¹⁴ *Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

Hebrews 3:13 *but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

'Truthing' each other lovingly is when we come together and hear the Scriptures read. It is when we sing the Scriptures to God and in one another's ears. It is when we hear the Scriptures preached. But it is also when we meet in smaller groups on Wednesday and discuss the truth. It is when you give testimony of the truth of God in your life to others present. It's when you join one of the prayer and study groups we're starting on Saturday mornings where we'll study truth, speak about it to each other and then pray about it. It can be when you read the Bible and pray with your children. It can be when you share a Scripture with your spouse. It can be when you are just talking after church and you tell another Christian how a particular Scripture helped you and encouraged you this last week. It could be when you take one of the newer Christians under your wing and meet every week or two and go through a discipleship book. It could be that you phone someone in church, read a Scripture to them, pray with them over the phone. It could be that you prepare a testimony of how the Word has worked in your life and share it on Wednesday night.

We aren't all going to do it that same way. One of us is going to do it very quietly, through a hospital visit and a card. Another of us is going to do it with a letter and a gift. Another of us will do it with an encouraging one on one. Another of us will do it through a public testimony. Another of us will do it through an email, or an SMS. The point is, however you do it – your ministry is lovingly 'truthing' others. It is finding ways, and being led by God to speak the truth of God to other believers in the context of loving relationships.

When you present yourself within body life, and begin supplying the body with loving truth, your unique gifts will be used to only strengthen the body. Just stop and think what happens to a church, when 150 people are regularly, lovingly, sincerely 'truthing' each other.

Do you know what the result is? Unity of the faith – because we're discussing it together so much. Unity of the knowledge of the Son of God – because we're continually sharing how the knowledge of Christ is changing our lives. Maturity – because we're continually showing

how the truth of God is to be applied; how it is to change our lives. Conformity to Christ – because we're seeing the character of Christ revealed to us in all this truth and love being shared.

So firstly, let me ask you if you are part of the body that is connected to the head? Have you ever been connected to Jesus Christ so that He is your life? Have you believed the good news that God will forgive you of your sins if you turn from them and trust Jesus Christ to forgive you and renew you?

Second, are you present and available in this body? Or do we need to tranquilliser dart you to catch you on a Sunday morning before you make it to your car? Are you connected to the people of this body in a way that allows you to know them, and to be known by them?

Third, are you lovingly 'truthing' others in this congregation? Start somewhere. Start simple. Use what you know to encourage, exhort, and help someone you know. Small beginnings, but it will grow. You will see how God energises and uses your particular gifting to bless this body.