

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
September 2019

(added progressively after each Sunday)

(see following pages)

Once We Were Separated. But Now United – Pt 2

per S Olyott

(Review of last week)

He goes on in verse 15 to explain this a little bit more: We can put it like this: What is all this about *the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, ...*? The Jews had a ceremonial law – certain things were clean; certain things were unclean. If you touched certain things you became unclean. Then you had to go through a cleansing process, by which you lost your defilement. Certain days were holy; other certain days we're not considered so holy. There were sacrifices and rituals, garments and processions, objects, Tabernacles – all sorts of ceremonial law. The real cause of hostility between Jew and Gentile, was that ceremonial law. The Jew considered the Gentile to be unclean. The Gentile looked on the Jew: jealous of his spiritual privileges. Sometimes he was hostile towards him, because he thought the Jew was arrogant. Considering himself to be superior to the Gentile. That ceremonial law was the source of hostility, tension and bitterness.

Now that ceremonial law was a preparation for the coming of Christ. Everything in it had a special significance in this regard. It was also a foreshadowing of the coming of Christ. So when Christ came, there was no longer any need for the ceremonial law. When Jesus died on the cross. All previous sacrifices became obsolete. When Jesus entered into Heaven as a Great High Priest. The Levitical priesthood became obsolete. When Jesus Christ cleansed His people by His blood and by the in-dwelling of His Spirit, all that ceremonial business of defilement and cleansing became obsolete. All finished! There's no longer any place for it. Therefore Jesus Christ by his death has destroyed the cause of hostility between Jew and Gentile.

Christ has destroyed the enmity between the Jew and the Gentile!

Salvation is offered to all, on the basis of Jesus Christ's blood and righteousness. If a Jew believes and comes to Christ; if a Gentile believes and comes to Christ, they are cleansed by the same blood. They have reckoned to them that same righteous life. They are in-dwelt by the same Spirit. They depend on the same High Priesthood. There is no barrier to divide them. It's in that way that the Lord Jesus Christ made peace. As we read in verse 15.

He's brought about a 'new nation' on Earth, composed of believing Jews and believing Gentiles. The world used to be divided into Jew and Gentile. (It is no longer divided in that way in God's reckoning and it's a sin to continue it!) The world is only divided now into the one new humanity, 'in' Christ, and the lost humanity, of those who are not 'in' Christ! That is the only distinction in humanity today.

Verse 16: (He) ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Jews, gentiles, both reconciled to God the same way: by the same Cross; by the same broken body; by the same sacrifice. Therefore there is no cause whatever, in the divine reckoning, that there be any division between them any more.

This is immensely important teaching: It's important that we recognise that the ceremonial law is gone forever! There are many Christians who don't recognise that today.¹

The ceremonial law is gone! The cause of enmity has gone! There is no such thing as a Hebrew Christian and a Gentile Christian. There are only, now, Christians. That's all! There are still two sorts of people in the world, but they're not Jew and Gentile. They are the new humanity and the unsaved humanity.

Verses 17 & 18: ¹⁷ *And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.* ¹⁸ *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

"We are 'one nation' ", says the Apostle Paul.

The Lord Jesus Christ came and preached to the Gentile and to the Jew alike! Some may find that statement surprising. Because they're vague about the nature of New Testament preaching. Look at verse 17 carefully: He's talking to the Ephesians, who had only heard the preaching of the Apostle Paul. Where he says, " He (that is Christ) preached to 'you', who were far off". Isn't this amazing. Jesus had never visited Ephesus. They had never seen the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. Yet Paul insists that Jesus Christ preached the Gospel at Ephesus! Because he did! When Jesus Christ sends messengers to preach the Gospel. Although the physical lips that announce the word are not those physical lips that spoke in Nazareth, it is none the less Jesus Christ, speaking personally, in the Gospel.

Though there are many messengers, who have been sent into all the world, each messenger, who faithfully announces the Christ-given Gospel, is to be received 'as Christ'. "The one who listens to you", Jesus says to his Apostles, "listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; ..." (Luke 10:16) The Jews themselves say, "He who is sent is as he who sends."

So the Ephesians heard the Gospel – but it was Jesus Christ who was addressing them in the Gospel. The Saviour Himself! Which is why any who are unconverted and hear Christ's Gospel, should fear: terribly. When the Gospel is given and rejected, it is not the preacher who is rejected, but the Lord Christ himself! It is the only Saviour, who is being rejected.

When the Gospel comes to you, however stumblingly, from human lips – if it is truly the Gospel of the Bible – it is Jesus Christ Himself who is addressing you. Not the preacher. Jesus Christ hasn't restricted His Gospel message to the Jew or the Gentile. But He has preached to those who were far off (the Gentile) and He's preached to those who are near (the Jew) and they both have access to God in the same way. The same Spirit has brought them to the same Christ (verse 18) and by the same Christ they have access to the same Father.

1 Leaders of the Charismatic Movement in the latter twentieth Century have made 'suggestions' that Christians should go to the land that calls itself Israel, to observe the Feast of Tabernacles there. Several thousand Christians did this at that time. This suggestion was at best misguided. Because the Feast of Tabernacles is part of ceremonial law. It's part of that law that looks forward and prefigures the coming of Christ. With Christ's coming, all those Old Testament feasts are made redundant, superfluous and obsolete. To resurrect them again, is of course a denial of the fullness and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

So it is clear, we Gentiles, are no longer outside 'Israel'. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ you are 'Israel'. Very important teaching. In the Old Testament all of God's Israel was found in the earthly nation of Israel. (teaching which is found in Romans 4 and 9 and in Galatians).

But in the New Testament, God's Israel is found both within the earthly nation of Israel and among the other earthly nations. Out of all these He has made His new humanity – His 'New Israel'.

There's only one true Israel! There's always been only one. God's Israel! It was once restricted to a particular earthly nation, now it's found among all earthly nations. We're not strangers to this Israel. We're not strangers to the Covenant. We are, part and parcel, of the true Israel. We are the people of God. We are the 'new nation'. So has said the Apostle: "Never forget what you are!"

Now we turn our attention to verses 19 to 22:

We must never forget what we once were. We must never forget what we are now. We are now one 'new nation'. And as these last 4 verses suggest, we are like a 'household'.(Verse 19) ¹⁹ *So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, ² you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,*

In a city, in the ancient world, there were two sorts of people who lived within the city walls: there were foreigners who lived there but had no right of residence – they ran their businesses and we're tolerated. But they had no right to live there; they had no say in the city affairs; they didn't really belong.

Then there were the citizens who belonged there, by right! He calls them: 'fellow citizens'. That's what we are like, as far as the true Israel of God is concerned. We're not strangers. We're as much citizens of Israel as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and David. We're as much members of God's Israel as they were. *Fellow citizens with the saints*. We're not in anyway inferior or second rate. We're as much citizens as they were! That's what we now are.

Verse 19 also referred to our former state as 'aliens', while instead we *are members of the household of God*. Sometimes into the tight circle of a family comes somebody else. He doesn't belong! Because the others have the 'family relationship'. We were like that. We were people who didn't belong to God's family. But now we are *of the household of God!*

In verse 20 Paul shifts his illustration to consider the building that houses this household. Imagine a building with two walls joining at right angles to each other. Initially it might appear that they have nothing to do with each other. "But they do!" says the Apostle. Because both walls are built on the same foundation. That Gentile wall and that Jewish wall are both built on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets. If you're any sort of Christian you believe in the apostolic message. You

2 Again we stress this Christian language: Can you talk like that about yourself -- "Now I am no longer as I was before!" Christians talk that way; non Christians can't, and if you can't talk that way it's because you're still a non-Christian!

believe the message that was preached by the New Testament prophets, who existed in the New Testament Church – until the Scriptures were complete. For all Christians: Jews or Gentiles – their faith rests on the message of the Apostles and Prophets. But not only so. These two walls meet at a corner: at the cornerstone that simultaneously supports both walls. The Stone on which both walls rest and which if taken away would cause both walls to collapse. That same corner stone for both Gentile and Jewish believers is the Lord Jesus Christ!

Verses 21 & 22: The bricks that form the wall, rest on the foundation; are connected to the corner stone; and are linked (or bonded) to each other. Every person who is a Christian is one of those bricks. And the whole building is growing into a Temple. As a Gentile you don't have to stay outside and fondly long to be admitted into the Temple. As a Gentile believer you're one of the bricks. The same as if you're a Jewish believer: you're one of the bricks. Every believer is one of the bricks in the whole structure which is God's Temple.

That's the only temple God has today. His Providence swept away the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70. It never will be rebuilt. If it were to be rebuilt, God wouldn't recognise it. The only Temple that God now recognises is the one built as described in this passage. The new Israel is the new Temple.

Note the spirituality of the new Temple. Believers don't stand outside the building anymore, because as a Christian you are the Temple. Think what you once were: outside (even the Jews were excluded from the 'inner presence'.) Think what you now are: actually 'part and parcel' of the Temple. However that Temple doesn't just exist for the new Israel – it exists for God. As we see at the end of verse 22. The old Temple signified the dwelling place of God on earth. And the New Temple is the dwelling place of God on earth. The true spiritual Temple of God is not in the physical structure of the past, but in the household of believers, which demonstrate the three-way interconnection of the believer: founded on Scripture; connected to Christ; and linked to each other in this ultimate spiritual 'building'.

If you are a Christian you are a brick of the temple. Think what you once were. Now think what you are: Resting on the Lord Jesus Christ and the apostolic message, you are with the whole family of God, the very dwelling place of God on Earth. A tremendous privilege.

So we're not only one with Christ, but we are one with each other. We were once separated but now we're united. In an age of significant migration between countries and cultures, Christians from different countries are able to experience and demonstrate this unity which is such an important illustration of Christian privilege. Despite language and cultural impediments, we can all experience the 'oneness' of being the 'Lord's people'.

We see from this passage the marvellous things God has done for us: God has given us all a memory and we're commanded to use it to remember what we once were. We remember with shame what we once were, and we remember with horror, because if

we'd been left like that we would have been damned forever. But the God who has commanded that we remember what we once were, also commands us to remember what we are now. And we do that with great humility, because we are only what we are now, because of the Cross. Because of the blood of the Son of God. Because of His broken body – as Paul has reminded us today.

But we also remember with great rejoicing, because He has freely blessed us and bestowed upon us these immense privileges. We were once separated from God. We're now united to him. We were once separated from each other – now united to each other.

There are two lessons: We must really Glory in the cross, like we have never done before.

And the second lesson is to guard, jealously, the unity of the Church. Not a made up, political so-called Unity – of which the World Council of Churches pretends to be the figurehead. But the unity within a local congregation, where the Lord Jesus Christ is loved and honoured. It makes a mockery of the New Testament picture to think of 'bricks' falling out. Not cohering with each other. Out of line with each other. This is one of those passages that show to us that next to the law and the Gospel itself, there can hardly be anything in the world, more important than this idea: of the unity within the local church.

So as we Glory in the Cross – as we must do – if we understand this passage, we also work for the unity of the church.

[2357]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Paul Talks About Himself

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

This passage is sometimes headed as, Mystery Explained, and so it proves to do. But through Paul's inimitable style it also shows us a lot about what sort of man he was and that we do well to seek to emulate him.

We know that he is the commissioned Apostle to the Gentiles; that he has been explaining to them what has happened to them:

- once they were dead but now spiritually alive,
- once separated from God's initially believing people, the Jews,
- now united, of the same nation,
- members now of the one building in which God dwells.

He has explained why he's been doing this in chapter 1: where he prayed that they would come to recognise and understand what a tremendous change had come over them.

Now in Chapter 3 he's about to tell them the other things that he prays for them.

However look first at the beginning of verse 1 and then at verse 14.

¹For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— (where the dash is significant!) and then *¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,*

What he intended to say was: *For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, I bow my knees before the Father, ...*

But on getting to the word 'Gentiles' he goes off on a separate train of thought (as was his habit to do) before he returns, at verse 14, to tell them what he intended to say about what further he prayed for them.

What was that intervening thought? "I'm the Apostle to the Gentiles – they are Gentiles." So he considers the relationship between them – and in so doing gives us an insight into an Apostle's 'heart'. We ask this passage 2 questions: What sort of a man is he, and what is the nature of the message that he preaches? There are 5 points for each question.

What sort of man?

1. He has a strong view of Providence.

It is an understatement to say that Paul had a lot of time for Gentiles! Recently, at the conclusion of his third missionary Journey, he was in Jerusalem with eight of

his companions, including a Gentile Christian, Trophimus of Ephesus. While there he went with 4 Nazarites who were seeking a cleansing ceremony in the Temple, after completing a vow (similar to that of Samuel and Sampson). Paul wanted to show that he honoured the Jewish customs, actually paying for these Temple rites. However many in the crowd that were already suspicious of his previous activities with Gentiles, having seen him with a Gentile in the town, assumed that Paul had taken a Gentile past the wall of separation into the forbidden area of the Temple grounds. Acts 21:28,29

A riot developed and Paul's life was threatened until the Roman guards intervened. The result: he was arrested and he claimed Roman citizenship, meaning that he would be shipped off to Rome to be tried in Caesar's court.

Paul as he is writing is a prisoner because of his association with Gentiles: ... *a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles*

But why say, *a prisoner for Christ Jesus* ? Since he was to be tried, unfairly by Caesar, should he not have said, *a prisoner of unfair Romans*?

But no! He sees Christ's 'hand' in everything that has taken place. Providence!

2. Clear sense of commission (stewardship) Verses 2 & 7

² *assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, and* ⁷ *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.*

He takes it for granted that they have heard of him, and that God put this ministry (to the Gentiles) into his hands. A gift of grace given, not for Paul to personally enjoy, but for the Gentiles' benefit.

He was not self-appointed! He was made a Minister; equipped by God; energised by God.

We learn from this a process. The way by which Ministers are made. Appointed by God! If we recognise that we need more God appointed Ministers – then the solution is to address the request to God.

3. Overwhelming sense of privilege Verse 8

⁸ *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*

The unsearchable riches of Christ! Paul has already, in the earlier chapters, extolled his readers never to forget what they once were and what their riches of Christ now are.

So Paul himself, recalling with shame his earlier persecution of Christ's Church; ranking himself below the very least of the saints; is ever so grateful for being saved, having in addition the overwhelming privilege to preach to the Ephesians. No wonder he preached with such conviction!

He knew and understood just how much Christ had done for him. It strengthened his Ministry,

So far then what sort of man does Paul prove to be?

- A strong view of Providence
- clear sense of commission
- overwhelming sense of privilege.

But in addition:

4. He was more concerned with others than himself.

Verse 1 *on behalf of you Gentiles ;*

Verse 2 *for you ; and*

Verse 13 ¹³ *So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.*

Here is Paul in prison for the sake of Gentiles – not a trace of bitterness. After years of preaching he hasn't forgotten that he was given this stewardship not for his sake but for theirs. Astonishing! Although he's in prison he has no thought for himself. His worry was that they might lose heart at what he was going through. He reassures them that rather, they should glory in his situation. It is not a shame to be in prison, when it is due to the worthwhile cause of bringing the Gospel – God's glory – to the Gentiles. They should be proud – to glory in the accomplishment of the Gentile Mission.

Consider this: What would have been lost if Paul had not been confined in prison for that lengthy time? No letters to: Colossians, Philemon, Philippians and this letter to the Ephesians!

5. He enjoyed fellowship with God (made more powerful because it is more hinted at that stated) Verse 12

In the preceding verse he mentions Christ Jesus our Lord and immediately that thought crosses his mind he has to add, ¹² *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.*

Christ is the One through whom he comes boldly to God (even as a child approaches his father). Christ has taken away the terror of God's presence – that the Israelites experienced at Sinai. Giving Paul (and us) access to God. Even in Jail, Paul extols the benefit from Christ of access to and confidence in God. Fellowship!

With the exception of the Apostolic Commission, which ceased with the committing of the Gospel to writing by the superintendence of the Apostles, do we have these qualities of Paul today?

The second question we ask of this passage is what is Paul's message? Once again five points:

1. A revealed message. Verses 3,4,5,& 6

A received message because its been given by God. Not a man made (up)

message.

Paul, personally, was a receptor of revelation. He was given an inspired understanding (verse 4) as can be seen from what he has written.

We, on the other hand are not receptors of direct revelation! The Apostles and prophets of the New Testament Church were (verse 5) directly by the Spirit. Through the written Gospel, now there is no need for man-made messages because we have the messages revealed to those Apostles and prophets.

People are not saved by 'made up' messages. That many do make up messages, explains why the visible church of today has lost much of its power.

2. The message is a mystery.³ This word used 3 times in our translation. (verses 3, 4 and inferred in 6)

The English meaning of 'mystery' is – an unexplained riddle. Like that of the Mystery of the Mary Celeste.⁴ But like so many richer words which are inadequately translated from the Greek it has a different meaning. This is often hard to research thousands of years later. The Biblical meaning is – something formerly hidden (by God) but now revealed to a few.⁵

Paul says several times that the Gospel is a mystery. It's a truth that has never been understood before – hidden. But now revealed to a few, by God, through such an unlikely one as the persecutor on the Damascus road. And to the holy Apostles and the prophets of the New Testament Church.

In the Old Testament it was made plain that the number of believing Jews would diminish until only a remnant remained, This was clear! And it was even promised (through Abraham) that Gentiles would at last enter into the privileges of God. (By Abraham the Nations would be blessed).

But what was not made plain was that believing Jews and believing Gentiles would be One Body! Gentiles who believed would be on the same footing as Jews who believed. One Nation. That in God's mind the barrier would be obliterated. Both groups of believers would become one – fellow heirs. So what Paul describes as having been a mystery is that Jew and Gentile are now the one 'Israel of God'. The still to be fulfilled promises made to the Jews are now being fulfilled through and for the new Israel of God. The Christian Church made up of former Jews and Gentiles. Now all are members of the same building – Christ's body the Church. Wherein God in-dwells. No such persons as Hebrew Christians and Gentile Christians. Only Christians. Yes there are two sorts of people in the world at large – they are the saved and the lost.

3 **μυστηρίω** (mystēriō) a mystery or secret doctrine

4 A sailing ship which was lost briefly, but when found was intact, seaworthy but with no crew. No sign of damage or reason for the crew to have abandoned it. None of the crew were ever found. After 150 or so years, it is still a mystery – an unexplained riddle.

5 Like the family situation where in the preparation for Christmas, presents are hidden, but eventually become known to a few.

3. So it's a message for the World. Verses 8 & 9

⁸ *To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,* ⁹ *and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things,*

When the Gospel is preached unsearchable (unfathomable) riches are preached. He wants all the world to see the blessings of the Gospel, for the fellowship that is brought about. Firstly with God (the vertical component) and with each other (horizontal) – the fellowship of the mystery.

4. A message for the angels Verse 10

... to be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

These can be interpreted as the various ranks of angels – good and bad. To them the example of the Church on earth (Jew with Gentile) should be noted and followed. Bringing about the result that Christ is indeed the Lord of the Universe. Make known, through the Church, the manifold⁶ wisdom of God. Good and bad angels survey the world. God sent the Gospel to teach them also! Angels can learn from the ideal of the Christian Church.

5. A message which brings (in time) an eternal purpose. Verse 11

A common theme in the Gospel by John. That Christ's sheep, the eternally chosen elect are to found, changed and saved. This is the purpose of preaching the Gospel as well attested by Paul throughout.

The passage draws to our notice and attention, that having seen the dedication and sincerity of Paul, we should seek to not be a poor comparison with him. For which result we will need God's help.

And from the message the passage contains, we must do everything we can to spread the *unsearchable riches of Christ*.

[1988]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

⁶ Manifold: many sided like the facets of a diamond. Many views but still one diamond. Also the word used in Greek (its only occurrence in the New Testament) can be used to describe embroidery such as a patch-work quilt. Many patterns but one quilt. **πολυποίκιλος** (polypoikilos) manifesting itself in a great variety of forms.

Paul's Prayer for the Church

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

Over the many centuries, AD, serious scholars of the Bible – even those who don't believe it – have acclaimed this passage as a most sublime passage in the New Testament. Can we not be moved by its power and elegance?

As we come to this exalted passage we remember that in earlier chapters Paul has been at pains to assure the recent converts in Ephesus of his prayers. Hopefully since we were earlier reminded of this need of new Christians, that we too have been ceaselessly praying for ours.

The content of the prayers that he prayed, ceaselessly, began with the plea for their coming to know and appreciate the wonder and divine power by which they had been made spiritually alive by God alone – their conversion. And that they would also see where their 'calling' would lead. To the 'certain' hope of the splendours of heaven.

Now he further prays for them in this 'noble and elevated', sublime passage from verse 14 of Chapter 3. It's Paul's prayer to the Church, which aims to raise us all to a higher level of understanding, love and devotion towards our Saviour Christ.

It divides into 3 parts with 2, 3 and 4 subsections in each part respectively. It is so typical of the Word of God that while it is so profound in what it teaches, it is nevertheless simple in presentation. There is nothing in all the world like it. Whenever you open to read it: admire it. It truly reveals, 'Profound gems in such simple boxes'!

1. (verses 14 &15) Paul's approach: ⁷

In coming to God on behalf of the Ephesians, his approach is 2-fold.

- He bows his knees ... He acknowledges, before he starts to pray, that he is praying to God the King,
- As he goes on in verse 14 he not only says, "I bow my knees..." , but equally he says, "before the Father." And this brings to mind what Paul has previously said, that *God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ*. And together *from whom the whole family in Heaven and on Earth is named*. This thought stems from Paul's understanding that God has one eternally begotten Son,

⁷ If we look at verse 1 (of Chapter 3) we will see (as we did last week) that Paul uses the same first three words as verse 14 'For this reason'. At that point he introduced himself, claiming that he was a prisoner for Jesus Christ and that he was so on behalf of you Gentiles. Then the translation enters a '--'! As he dictates his letter and mentions 'Gentiles' his mind takes off on a new thought which he expounds through to verse 13. Then at verse 14 he takes up his original purpose. This intervening thought was the cause of his new petitions (for this reason) and related to the new common status of believing Jews and believing Gentiles as equal heirs of the new 'Israel of God' and 'bricks' in the building of Christ's Church of which Christ was the corner stone. Here he reveals the former hidden mystery to the few – to believers. As Paul announces the recipients of the benefits of his being a prisoner of Jesus Christ, he is overtaken by the knowledge that Christ's Church, having no division of Jew against Gentile, has been faithfully demonstrated by the new Christians at Ephesus. So he then petitions for greater blessings to come to them.

the Lord Jesus Christ. So he naturally describes the named family. Further in Chapter 1 Paul has already said that the family has in addition an immense number of adopted sons, who share this family Name of God and the Son.

In noting the two-fold way in which Paul approaches God in Prayer: As King and Father. We may recognise that this is not so in many prayers offered in the Christian Church. At one extreme is the prayer that approaches God as so great and distant that it seems that He could not possibly have anything to do with us. The other extreme, only remembers Him as Father, with a sickening intimacy, as if He were some sort of 'best pal' – no sense of Godhead. Merely some sort of invisible 'mate'.

Paul has the balance: God is God – to whom the knee is to be bowed in homage; and He is our (heavenly) Father. This is all in accord with the direct teaching of Jesus:

*Our Father in heaven;
hallowed be your name.*

We must (at our peril) keep both, King and Father, in balance.

2. (verses 16-19) What Paul Prayed. The 3 petitions.
As he continues, having approached God as King and Father, he cites *the riches of His glory*. From the mighty God and Father he is about to make huge requests (petitions) for the Ephesians. God's riches are infinite – an acknowledgement of His kingship. Then when he makes all three petitions he returns to this at verse 19 asking that in all things, that they should be filled with all the fullness of God. The riches of God are limitless. We can (and should) pray to match.

Paul then, is bold to expect that all the saints in Ephesus will receive this sort of abundance – even the slaves. Why? Because He is also Father of all believers. As God the King he has limitless capacity, and as Father he has the grace to give of this capacity.

Paul then asks the King/Father for three things, each introduced by the word 'that'.

- (verse 16) *that ... He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being.*
- (verse 17) *(so) that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith –*
- (verse 17b - 19a) *that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*

And all these Paul is praying are asked to be granted to the ultimate degree: (verse 19b) *that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

In thee petitions Paul prays for their, will, heart and mind and he speaks about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That is he calls the whole of the Godhead to do something for the whole of the Christian. And we note that he is praying for changes that are internal (spiritual) not external.

- First Petition – to do with the will. (verse 16)

be strengthened with power through His Spirit

A new Christian – who may also be young in years – goes off to work during the week, where generally there is little to no Christian fellowship and little opportunity to access the Bible, due to the needs of the job. Temptations, perhaps just by ‘fitting in’ and silent ‘peer pressure’ arise. The **will** of the new (or old, for that matter) Christian, who is not yet spiritually strong, may be too weak to resist.

Those that are stronger, in similar situations, prove to be graciously principled. Their will is strong. Perhaps they were not like that previously. But now they are. A clear ‘working’ of the Spirit is present.

Paul ask for this. Strength *in the inner being*.

How are new Christians made strong like this? By the Church’s prayer.

- Petition 2 – the prayer not only to do with the will, but also the heart. (verse 17a)

¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*— where the Greek might be more accurately translated as: *at home in your heart*.

To explain this we should refer to John 14:15-23⁸

What’s Jesus saying in this familiar passage?

“If you do what I say I will manifest myself in you. I’ll be a living reality in you. By means of the Holy Spirit I’ll make my home in your heart. You’ll have a consciousness that I’m not only with you, but in you. If you love me you’ll keep my words. My Father and I will come and make our home in you.”

That’s what Paul is talking about. When a person obeys the Word of God, he has a sense of the presence of Christ in his life.

Why might a person obey Christ’s Word. Because they believe it! And that’s what Paul prays for: that Christ will dwell in your heart by faith. (Where faith has the three components of knowledge; assent; and trust – which is saving faith, belief!

Perhaps from time to time you will meet people who have such a personal sense of Christ’s presence that they quite naturally talk to Him. Paul prays like that.

- Petition 3 – Paul’s prayer for the Church (to pray) is for the mind of the new believer. (verse 17b -19a)

... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and

8 Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit: ¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

¹⁸ “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” ²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

depth, ¹⁹ *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*
“When your heart is filled with love. When you are rooted and grounded in love for Christ, I pray that you will have something further – comprehend further – grasp something. So that in you mind you will get hold of something that is ungraspable! Something that is beyond knowledge..”

Consider the task of surveying the Pacific Ocean. Separate project teams have the task of plumbing the depths. Others the length, breadth and height. (Here the analogy breaks down, because, while the ocean is vast it is not limitless. While the vastness of God is infinite.) Each group may have amassed great knowledge. Then if the groups come together they see that they each still only have a part.

Paul prays that you will explore the depth of Christ’s love and you will have limitless experience of His love in your heart such that this will enhance your mind – your understanding. So much so that it will *be filled with all the fullness of God.*

We learn from this that there is always further for all of us to go in the Christian experience and growth. No one can say that they ‘have arrived’! We all should pray for new Christians as Paul directs and at the same time see to the development of our own spiritual growth.

3. (verses 20-21) Paul’s Doxology

Having now made these highly ambitious petitions – in the great confidence of the God and Father having the capacity and grace to grant them, to Christians, Paul can hardly not resolve into praise for God. He has 4 things in mind.

○ An attribute of God (verse 20)

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,*
Tremendous verse! There is no limit to what God can do for and in us! No limit.⁹ No limit to His power, to do and grace to give.

Have you limited God’s power this morning. Have you said inside, “There’s nothing more He can do for me!” Away with such thoughts. See what God can do ...

So Paul in his doxology has in mind an attribute of God: unlimited power.

○ A desire (verse 21)

²¹ *to Him be glory in the Church ...*

Paul has many things that he wants for the Ephesians, but he has something that he wants (desires) even more: he wants God to be glorified, worshipped and praised with all the credit to God. All creatures everywhere to have high

⁹ Think about Paul in having this letter written. He didn’t write personally. He dictated to an amanuensis – a secretary. Pacing around the prison cell as he thought about the best way to describe what was in his inspired heart: Perhaps he starts out with this sentence by saying, “Now God is able to do all that we ask.” That would be quite good. But then he adds, “or think.” That’s better. But he flays the air, exclaiming, “No. No! ... “more abundantly” and finally “far more abundantly!”

thoughts of God.

Are you in line with the Apostle on that desire also?

- A place (verse 21)

²¹*to Him be glory in the Church ...*

In what place should praise to God be given? In the Church. But what is the Church? That company of men and women who are 'in Christ Jesus' – hence he uses 'in the Church in Christ Jesus'.

The first task of the Church is thus made obvious:

- Not primarily a fellowship (although it should be this!)
- Not primarily an evangelising agency (although it is to do this by the command of Christ)

The primary task of the Church (in Christ) is to be the company of people (His Body) who worship before God – seeking to make His glory known on Earth.

- A time! (verse 21b)

²¹*to Him be glory ... throughout all generations, for ever and ever. – (so be it) – Amen.*

This glory of God in the Church is to be eternal. The love of Christ is wider, longer, deeper and higher, so Paul must call for the glory of the Father, who sent Christ, to be for ever and ever – without end.

Are doxologies part of your praying? Do you have such high thoughts of God? Are the Apostle's desires shared by you?

When we read the Apostle's sublime prayer, and we get an insight into his heart, we realise (if we didn't before) that we are still spiritual babes. We see again the urgent need to pray like this for each other!

[1982]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

Ephesians 4:1-16

The Unity of the Church

based on: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

In our study of Ephesians we have noted that the first three chapters have been doctrinal in nature: what we as Christians are to believe. Now we will find that the final three chapters will tell us how as Christians we are to behave. We should note that Christians are not just people who believe in a certain way, but as a consequence of what they believe they necessarily should behave in a certain way. It is thus necessary then, to start with the doctrinal foundation of that behaviour. A common error is to assume that a Christian life can be lived without being a Christian believer. The doctrine has to be there first.

Paul begins this second section of his letter with pleas for the new Christians in Ephesus – and everywhere else – that having confirmed the doctrinal foundation of their faith their Christian living must be consistent with it. He deals with three aspects:

- How to live the Christian Life at Church (today and next week);
- How to live the Christian Life in the world (several further weeks); and
- How to live the Christian Life at home (in the family) and at work.

Chapter 4:1-16, A Christian Life at Church – The Unity of the Church.

The concept of unity in the church, in this context, is not that of a World Council of Churches or the modern trend to bring all sorts of religious associations under the same umbrella. Unity in the local church is what the context of Paul's letter, first to the Ephesian Church, and by extension to us, is.

Remember Paul's main point to the Ephesians, was that the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile had now, in God's sight, been removed. They were both the one nation; not two separate walls, but a single building with walls that meet at the chief corner stone: Christ Himself. This doctrine was being demonstrated in the Church at Ephesus and hopefully elsewhere in space and time. So if the doctrine establishes that in God's sight all members of the local church are one, then we must live as one. That life, being a faithful consequence of the belief (doctrine). It is an ungodly outcome if there is disunity in the local people of God. So this is an important message.

History and our contemporary knowledge has many dismal examples of such ungodly behaviour in groups who claim to be Christian believers. Church groups do split as an inevitable outcome of disunity within. Evangelical and Reformed alike. And perhaps worse, even if there is no open split, there can be cliques, splinter groups and mutual suspicion – dare I say, open jealousy – among the members of a church.

Paul warns that none are immune from this result. Even where there is a wonderful unity demonstrated in a church there is still a future threat. He warns even the Ephesians, who were an epitome of unity. In fact if he hadn't thought the warning was necessary he need not have written these 16 verses.

It is extreme folly to assume that it can't happen to any particular local church. So we should carefully consider how unity is to be maintained, preserved and promoted. Paul provides 4 points:

- (verses 1-3) – a negative - **Preserving Unity is not automatic.**

It doesn't just happen, it has to be worked at.

The principal petitioner for the Gentiles pleads with local churches to remember that they have been 'called' by their God. This is the doctrinal imperative. It is then essential that a certain standard of behaviour be a consequence. "(I) *urge you walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. ...*"

You're called out of the world. You're not like them anymore. Show it!

An important indicator of your different lives is your unity with the church.

Doctrinal unity (believing the truth – the whole counsel of God) is important, but relational, unity is crucial and if the appropriate attitudes are missing in the members, the church will ultimately divide.

(verse 2) "*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.*"

- Be prepared to take the lowest place. Paul at chapter 3:8 has already set the pattern where he takes the place of being 'less than the least of the Apostles ...' Each member is to be a willing servant to the other.
- Be gentle, meek (not weak) – meekness in the Bible means being strong without being self-assertive. Not bossy or pushy.
- Be patient, long suffering. You could encounter frequent hurt, yet refrain from complaining.
- Forbearing, bearing with. Decline to 'strike back' or retaliate if provoked. Remember that God Himself is 'slow to anger'! Take as your model the many attitudes and actions demonstrated by Christ Himself.

(verse 3) – the famous words, "(be) *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*" We don't create unity in the church - but we have to work to maintain it. It exists through the unity of the Spirit. The division between Jew and Gentile, for example was removed by Christ, leading to one nation, in Him. One building, with the members the 'bricks'. Accomplished by His cross! But it is possible for individuals or groups of Christians to live as if the Cross – Christ's victory – never happened. So we have to consciously endeavour to maintain the unity of the Spirit. To preserve the bond of peace (see Chapter 2), so that we remain bound to each other as Christ provided.

- (verses 4-6) **Unity is logical.**

If you look around you on a Sunday morning you might superficially wonder what

you have in common with the assembled congregation. You could dwell on this as those outside the church obsess about and risk overlooking to our detriment, the wealth of things that we have in common as Christians.

Paul says there are 7 things that we have in common in Christ. Therefore it is illogical to be divisive among ourselves.

- (verse 4) One “body”, In Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12,13,14, in this passage and elsewhere we understand that each local church is a body. Christ is the ‘head’, some members are: ears; eyes; mouth; feet ..., but all are members of the one body – of one another. The body is not meant to be ‘cut up’! It’s illogical to set eye against foot ...
This body has the same head with the same spiritual life flowing in it (more from Paul about this later). We are all united to Christ.
- One Spirit. If you believe the Gospel at all it’s because His Spirit has opened your eyes to see its truth. This same Spirit is at work in the local church.
- One hope in your ‘calling’. You’re called by the Gospel and set on the narrow road which leads to life. The end of that road is the dwelling place of God, which becomes ours as well. As His adopted children we’re on that same road because of the same calling of the same Father to live in His home. It’s illogical that we behave as though we are on different paths, going to different places. We have but one hope of our calling!
- (verse 5) One Lord. When each member prays, they pray to the same Lord. The same Lord as your fellow Brother and Sister. When you each read the Scripture and obey it, you’re submitting to the same Lordship of Christ.
- One faith. We noted the three components of saving faith recently. Knowledge, assent and trust. Each of us are Christians today because we have received the same truth, believe that truth and trust in Christ the subject of that truth. We each have received the gift of the same faith.
- One Baptism. (see also 1 Corinthians 1:12) All who are Christians at all have been baptised in the Holy Spirit. That’s what makes you a member of the Body of Christ. (There is only one such Baptism of the Spirit. The physical water Baptism – whenever it occurs – is a visible ‘sign and seal’ of this. The new Testament model was that this led immediately to the person formally becoming a member of their local church. Baptism unites, not divides!
- (verse 6) One God – Father of all. The precious name of God to His adopted, Christian, children is Father (Abba). Everyone who is a Christian can call God his Father – God who is *Father of all*. (Here we need to recognise the context in which ‘Father of all’ is used: Paul is talking about Unity in the Church. The context is ‘all’ Christians – not all humans.) God who is Father of all is over (above) all. Supreme over the Church. From Chapter 2 we know that the Church is God’s dwelling place on earth, replacing the notion of the Jerusalem Temple. He is ‘in you all’ as individual Christians, by means of His Holy Spirit.

So while we all differ in superficial ways, we have all these wonderful things in common. How can there then be divisiveness between us?

Unity is logical, while at the same time it is not automatic and able to be taken for granted. One positive point and one negative.

- (verses 7-12) -another negative point - **Unity is not uniformity.** Although we are 'all one', this does not mean we are all the same. We have different backgrounds, education, temperament, heritage, cultures. (The world likes to emphasise such differences. To the Christian they are irrelevant.) Christians don't have a uniform!
Here Paul raises the topic of Spiritual Gifts. Every believer has a gracious gift from God. That is each gift comes from the same source and for the same purpose. They are given by the Lord Jesus Christ according to His will. All are the fruit of Christ's ascension!

(verse 8) Paul quotes from the Old Testament as he speaks about the ascension of Christ.¹⁰ The familiar example (to his readers of that day) of the conquering hero of old, is however applied differently in the case of Christ. Of course our Lord has won an immense victory by His death and resurrection. He's led a host of captives (*led captive, captivity* in the KJV) – that's us, of course. We're seated in the heavenly places with Him. But contrary to the act of the spoil-laden returning Roman conqueror, the gifts have been given to the captives! That's the grace of God through the Gospel.

So this great conquering hero who is going to *fill all things* – because there is nowhere where Christ will not reign – is giving different gifts to each of the members of His local church. The same hand gives different gifts. So although we are 'all one' we are not all the same as people, or more importantly, in the way we are spiritually gifted.

(verse 11) To bring home this point the Apostle Paul reminds us of how a local church, in the first century was founded. It happened like this:
The ascended Christ, first of all sent to a certain area an apostle (not necessarily one of the Twelve etc). Apostles had a church founding Ministry – Ephesus by the Apostle Paul for example). Once the local church had been founded the ascended Christ sent to that church, prophets – the Scripture was not yet complete. The new members needed to 'feed on the Lord Jesus Christ' and they needed more than the Old Testament revelation to do this. Therefore in the early church there were prophets. People who had inspired utterances – had the Word of God in their mouth. They spoke therefore infallibly.¹¹ There are no such people as that, since then. The written Scriptures are now complete. (Revelation 22:18,19) While there are none now, at that stage in God's special revelation, they were still necessary. Agabus (Acts 21:11) was one and there

10 Psalm 68:18 (part of our Old Testament reading on 11th August 2019). In using this quote Paul also has in mind an example from his contemporary world: A very successful (Roman) general returning to Rome after a victorious battle leads a triumphal parade. Conspicuous in the parade would be his captives brought as bounty of his victory. He would then be elevated to the seat of honour with all the important people (senators and others) around him. And out of the vast 'spoils of war' he had brought with him, he would dispense gifts to those who were on his side.

11 The words spoken by men in the name of God since the New Testament Canon became adopted can be correct and useful but are not infallible as inspired prophecy is.

are (unnamed) references to others.

So the early local churches fed on the Lord Jesus through the Ministry of the prophets. But more was necessary. The Apostles also sent evangelists. Their ministry was to consolidate the local church to prepare it for the election of its own elders and to encourage it in its work of evangelism of its own district. After being founded by Paul, Timothy was later sent to Ephesus! Titus was sent to Crete and so on.

Next, elders had come into the life and ministry of a church. Causing that church to come to be in a 'settled' condition. These elders (verse 11) are referred to as pastors (shepherds) and teachers.

As you may know from: Acts 20; 1 Peter 5; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1, all elders are pastors and nobody can be an elder unless he is able to teach.

So God set in local churches, elders – pastors and teachers. At this point these churches had arrived at their settled condition. Apostles were no longer necessary; prophets were soon to be unnecessary; the evangelists, have gone on to somewhere else; and the local church is left in the hands of its pastors and teachers – that's one office not two!

The pastors and teachers (elders) set to the work (verse 13) of equipping the believing members (saints) for the work of Ministry. The building up the 'body' of Christ. With the result that spiritual gifts were raised up in that church, allowing each man and woman to apply to their particular work: building up the 'Body' of Christ.

Unity is thus not uniformity. So far we have seen this in the various ways in which those first churches were established. But next week we will take this point further as we explore the different ways spiritual gifts are applied to all the members, but in widely differing ways. Making the point that the local Church demonstrates unity but not by uniformity.

[2312]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.

The Unity of the Church – Pt 2

per: S Olyott

(Review of last week)

When Christian local churches were first established, they were organised and run with the aim (under the appointment and supervision of the Spirit of Christ) so as to equip the believing members (the saints) for the work of ministry – the building up of the ‘body of Christ’. Which is the local church. Through Christ’s Spirit, spiritual gifts were raised up in the members allowing each man and woman to apply themselves to their particular work in this ministry.

This was and is the united work of the local church members, but while the church is united in its purpose the individual members are not all the same in the ways they are equipped to bring about this united purpose. Unity but not uniformity! Is everyone the same in the local church? No. They all have different work to do. Different abilities. Different flare. They are good at different things. They are not expected to be all the same. Once this is grasped, jealousy ceases.

A sad thing that can be seen in churches is that of younger Christians modelling themselves on prominent older ones. Now they should model themselves, as far as character is concerned – in as much as the example shows following of Christ. But not as far as possessing a particular gift is concerned. Every Christian has different gifts. As one listens to the ministry, hearts are stirred in different directions. That which their heart is stirred to do: is their work.

We are all ‘one’ in our great experience of the Gospel, but we are not all one in the gifts which the Head of the Church has given us. The realisation of this does away with any feelings of pride, which would mar the unity of the church.

It may, hopefully rarely, be that a person be found strutting around the church because the Head of the Church had given him a public gift. He thinks he’s so great. That he is something special. But remember it’s the Head of the Church who gave that gift. It’s from the same source and for the same purpose as every other spiritual gift. Other people may have private gifts and they burn with envy that they don’t have similar public gifts. But the moment they recognise that the Head of the Church has given whatever gift is given and that they are all for the same purpose – the edification of the Church – pride ceases, envy ceases. Clashes cease, and we have the unity (of purpose) in the Church of which this passage is speaking.

Unity is not uniformity and the moment we seek uniformity we endanger unity!

To sum up so far: Local church Unity is not automatic. It requires effort to be maintained (a negative); Unity is logical (a positive); and Unity is not Uniformity (another negative), now:

- (verses 13-16) Unity is married to Maturity (a positive)
Christian Unity and Maturity go hand in hand. Not one without the other. When you have one you have the other.
(verse 13) Paul's picture (without going into every detail) is that each member in the local church lives for the 'body'. Each member contributes what he can for the good of the 'body'. Result – the 'body', as a body, comes to a common understanding of the faith. That is the Unity of the Faith. You share your knowledge of the Son of God. Another shares his knowledge of the Son of God with you, and the 'body', as we see in verse 13, grows as a consequence.
¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,
The 'body' is now taking on more of the stature and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The 'body' grows and grows in maturity until, in God's mercy, the 'likeness of Christ' is obvious and developed and complete.

Paul's desire, prayer, aim and 'picture' is in this verse 13. He then turns his attention specifically to the Ephesian church in verse 14. Looking to the day when certain things will be left behind. He wants that local church (and others like it) as a church to become mature. To be no longer like children. To be mature by leaving behind:

- spiritual immaturity, and
- gullibility.

Spiritual immaturity is demonstrated by being: *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, ..* This is so sad to hear about, back in Paul's day! And it is still seen and heard about, today – even in Bunbury!

People who believe one way one week and a different way the next. Believe the last 'post' on the internet they've had presented to them or the last TV evangelist? they've noticed. These are all classic signs of childhood!

And gullibility likewise. All sorts of people lying in wait to deceive. Using all sorts of cunningly contrive devices. Underhanded methods. It is a mark of childhood that we provide easy game for such deceivers.

Paul was looking forward to the day when the Ephesian Church wouldn't be like that any more. Maturity! Certainly when you have deceivers being offered a hearing in the local church you really do have disunity.

(verse 15) Paul looks forward to the day when each person in the church speaks the truth to each other member. The primary Truth being the truth of the Gospel. The truth of the Christian faith. And seeing this truth spoken in the right spirit: love. Everyone helping each other to recognise the insights that uncover all spiritual things.

(verse 16) So we are reminded that the local church is Christ's 'body'. The place where every 'organ' of that body joins with every other, Each has something to contribute. Where each part does its bit, so the whole is built up and edified.

¹⁵ *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ...* If each part does do its bit, in that right spirit, then the 'right spirit' pervades the whole of that church.

Paul's 'picture' of a united church is where: each member seeks the welfare – not of himself or his group, clique, friends etc – but of the whole local church. Where each member doesn't stand around saying, "There is nothing I can do!", but who seeks to find out what it is they have been equipped by the Head of the Church to do, so that they can get on and do it! No one thinking only of himself, but where each person is thinking of the welfare of every other person in the fellowship. Each filled with love for all the others, living his life for their good. That way the whole body grows, becomes more like Christ, being in full submission to the 'head'. Christ's character being realised in the whole local church 'body'.

The church becomes less dis-coordinated. Each member becomes more coordinated. Each part works better and better with the other parts. Unity is vitally linked with maturity. Christian maturity cannot exist in isolation. It could be that a fault in Protestant-ism is to think that Christian maturity principally exists in the individual. Whereas the whole genius of the New Testament is that it is the individual local church as a whole, which grows to maturity. This then is the way the individuals achieve maturity. I say again: Christian maturity – a necessary goal for each individual Christian – can not exist in isolation, but only in a church 'body'. Where the whole grows in maturity. We may have overlooked this fact. That mature churches are necessary for the individuals in them to grow to maturity. And that such churches go hand in hand with being united churches. Therefore in exercising the spiritual gifts we are endowed with these are to be used fully and thoroughly to develop the maturity of the local church. Only then, the individual's maturity follows, as a consequence.

Christian friends: This welfare and maturity cannot be fostered if members flit from one church to another. You can't live for the maturity of the church if you restrict yourself to the parts of church life that appeal to you. You can't live for the maturity of the church if you are inconsistent in your attendance. You can't live for the maturity of the church by passive attendance. Of course it's part of church life when we all sit and listen to teaching. That's only a very small part of church life. It's a key part, but it's not the whole by any means. You can't contribute to the life of the church by being poor at giving hospitality. You can't live for the welfare of the church by just restricting

yourself to getting to know only a few people. You certainly can't live for the maturity of the church by thinking of yourself first.

There's a lot of talk about, 'Christian living in the home'. Paul's going to talk about that soon, but he talks about fostering church maturity first! Because if you live right at church you're going to live right at home too. If you belong to a mature congregation you're going to live maturely at home.

There's a lot of talk about the way a Christian lives in the world. But Paul doesn't even talk about that until he has talked about the maturity of the local church. Because if you live well in a mature congregation, you'll live well during the other 6 days of the week. Sometimes we get it all the wrong way round.

Paul is telling us that our first commitment. The first place where we are to grow and develop: is within the 'body': the local church. Until we learn first how to live in the Christian church, we're going to fail everywhere else.

The whole integrity of your Christian life depends on how well you live in the church. But not only so. The actual integrity of the Christian life of others depends on how you live in the church. Every Christian who doesn't pull his weight 100% in the local church is actually penalising the spiritual progress of the other people in the same church. That is why we ignore a passage like this at our peril. (Olyott goes on to say that, it is better, with respect, for those of you who won't pull all your weight with the local church, to leave it. Leaving the 'body' filled with people applying all their energies to the welfare of that 'body' of Christ. As long as there are people attached, who call themselves parts of the 'body', but are only going to be half hearted and limp in their commitment to the local church, they not only penalise themselves, but they are actually holding back the spiritual progress of the others.)

"We cannot live and die to ourselves", says the Apostle Paul. It's because we try to do this that so often the unity of the church is threatened.

We should take this teaching to heart. The Apostle prefaced it by saying: "¹*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,* ²*with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,* ³*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"

[1919]

May it please God that all present, through Jesus Christ, shall have life through His Name.