

Christian Students Association Bible Study

January 26, 2021

The Living and Responsibility Needed for the Church in the Holy Spirit

The Living and Responsibility Needed in the Body of Christ

The Functioning of the Gifts and the Growth and Building Up of the Body of Christ - Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

8 Therefore the Scripture says, "Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men."

9 (Now this, "He ascended," what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended, He is also the One who ascended afar above all the heavens that He might fill all things.)

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers,

12 For the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ,

13 Until we all arrive at the oneness of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

14 That we may be no longer little children tossed by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching in the sleight of men, in craftiness with a view to a system of error,

15 But holding to truth in love, we may grow up into Him in all things, who is the Head, Christ,

16 Out from whom all the Body, being joined together and being knit together through every joint of the rich supply and through the operation in the measure of each one part, causes the growth of the Body unto the building up of itself in love.

Note for "But" in verse 7 – Concerning the Body of Christ, all the basic elements are one, but the gifts (the functions) are many and varied.

Note for “grace” in verse 7 - Here grace was given according to the gift; in Rom. 12:6 the gifts differ according to grace. Grace actually is the divine life that produces and supplies the gifts. In Rom. 12 it is the grace that produces the gift. Hence, the gift is according to grace. Here the grace is according to the gift, according to the measure of the gift. This is similar to our blood supplying the members of our body according to their size.

Note for “height” in verse 8 - *Height* in the quotation from Psa. 68:18 refers to Mount Zion (Psa. 68:15-16), which symbolizes the third heaven, where God dwells (1 Kings 8:30). Psalm 68 implies that it was in the Ark that God ascended to Mount Zion after the Ark had won the victory. Verse 1 of Psa. 68 is taken from Num. 10:35. This indicates that the background of Psa. 68 is God’s move in the tabernacle with the Ark as its center. Wherever the Ark, a type of Christ, went, the victory was won. Eventually, this Ark ascended triumphantly to the top of Mount Zion. This portrays how Christ won the victory and ascended triumphantly to the heavens.

Note for “those” in verse 8 - *Those* refers to the redeemed saints, who were taken captive by Satan before being saved by Christ’s death and resurrection. In His ascension Christ led them captive; that is, He rescued them from Satan’s captivity and took them to Himself. This indicates that He conquered and overcame Satan, who had captured them by sin and death. The Amplified New Testament renders “He led captive those taken captive” as “He led a train of vanquished foes.” Vanquished foes may refer to Satan, to his angels, and to us the sinners, again indicating Christ’s victory over Satan, sin, and death. In Christ’s ascension there was a procession of these vanquished foes, led as captives from a war, for a celebration of Christ’s victory.

Note for “gifts” in verse 8 - *Gifts* here does not refer to the abilities or capacities for various services but to the gifted persons in v. 11 — apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers. After conquering Satan and death and rescuing the sinners from Satan and death through His death and resurrection, Christ in His ascension made the rescued sinners themselves such gifts by means of His resurrection life and gave them to His Body for its building up.

Note for “lower” in verse 9 – Referring to Hades, which is under the earth. Christ went there after His death (Acts 2:27).

Note for “fill” in verse 10 – First, in His incarnation Christ descended from heaven to earth. Then, in His death He descended farther, from earth to Hades. Eventually, in His resurrection He ascended from Hades to earth, and in His ascension, from earth to heaven. Through such a journey He cut the way that He might fill all things.

Note for “some” in verse 11 – *Each one* in v. 7 includes every member of the Body of Christ, each of whom has received a general gift, whereas the four kinds of gifted persons mentioned here are those who have been endowed with a special gift.

Note for “perfecting” in verse 12 – Or, equipping, supplying the functions.

Note for “unto” in verse 12 – *Unto* here means *resulting in, for the purpose of, or with a view to*.

Note for “ministry” in verse 12 – The many gifted persons in the preceding verse have only one ministry, that is, to minister Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ, the church. This is the unique ministry in the New Testament economy (2 Cor. 4:1; 1 Tim. 1:12).

Note for “building” in verse 12 – According to the grammatical construction, the building up of the Body of Christ is the work of the ministry. Whatever the gifted persons in v. 11 do as the work of the ministry must be for the building up of the Body of Christ. However, this building up is not accomplished directly by the gifted ones but by the saints who have been perfected by the gifted ones.

Note for “arrive” in verse 13 – Or, attain to. This indicates that a process is required for us to attain to or arrive at the practical oneness.

Note for “oneness” in verse 13 – In v. 3 the oneness of the Spirit is the oneness of the divine life in reality; in this verse the oneness is the oneness of our living in practicality. We already have the oneness of the divine life in reality. We need only to keep it. But we need to go on until we arrive at the oneness of our living in practicality. This aspect of oneness is of two things: the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God. As revealed in Jude 3, 2 Tim. 4:7, and 1 Tim. 6:21, the faith does not refer to the act of our believing but to the things in which we believe, such as the divine person of Christ and His redemptive work accomplished for our salvation. The full knowledge of the Son of God is the apprehension of the revelation concerning the Son of God for our experience. The more we grow in life, the more we will cleave to the faith and to the apprehension of Christ, and the more we will drop all the minor and meaner doctrinal concepts that cause divisions. Then we will arrive at, or attain to, the practical oneness; that is, we will arrive at a full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Note for “The Son of God” in verse 13 – *The Son of God* refers to the Lord’s person as life to us, whereas *Christ* refers to His commission to minister life to us that we, the members of His Body, may have gifts for functioning. See note 16¹ in Matt. 16.

Note for “full-grown man” in verse 13 – A full-grown man is a mature man. Maturity in life is needed for the practical oneness.

Note for “fullness of Christ” in verse 13 – The fullness of Christ is the Body of Christ (1:23), which has a stature with a measure. To arrive at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is necessary for the practical oneness. Hence, from the oneness in reality we need to proceed to the oneness in practicality until we arrive at the three things mentioned in this verse — the oneness, a full-grown man, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Note for “little children” in verse 14 – Lit., infants. The same Greek word as for child in Gal. 4:1, referring to those believers who are young in Christ, lacking maturity in life (1 Cor. 3:1).

Note for “waves” in verse 14 – The waves stirred up by the winds of different teachings (1 Tim. 1:3-4), doctrines, concepts, and opinions are sent by Satan to entice the believers in order to carry them away from Christ and the church. It is difficult for the infants in Christ to discern these. The only way to escape from the waves that are stirred up by the winds is to grow in life, and the safe way to grow in life is to stay in the proper church life with Christ and the church as the safeguard.

Note for “wind of teaching” in verse 14 – Any teaching, even a scriptural one, that distracts believers from Christ and the church is a wind that carries believers away from God’s central purpose.

Note for “sleight of men” in verse 14 – The Greek word for sleight refers to the cheating of dice players. The word for craftiness denotes the trickery employed by gamblers. The teachings that become winds, carrying believers away from the central lane of Christ and the church, are deceptions instigated by Satan in his subtlety, with the sleight of men, in order to frustrate God’s eternal purpose, which is to build up the Body of Christ.

Note for “system of error” in verse 14 – The dividing teachings are organized and systematized by Satan to cause serious error and thus damage the practical oneness of the Body life. The sleight is of men, but the system of error is of Satan and is related to the deceitful teachings that are designed by the evil one to distract the saints from Christ and the church life.

Note for “holding to truth” in verse 15 – Or, truthing it. This is in contrast to the sleight and the error in v. 14. To be carried away by the winds of teaching in the sleight of men unto a system of error is to not hold to truth. *Truth* here means things that are true. According to the context, it must refer to Christ and His Body: both are true things. We should hold in love to these true things that we may grow up into Christ.

Note for “love” in verse 15 – This is not our own love but the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body. It is in such a love that we hold to truth, that is, to Christ with His Body, and are kept from being influenced by the winds of teaching and from bringing in elements that are foreign to the Body.

Note for “grow” in verse 15 – To be no longer little children (v. 14), we need to grow up into Christ. This is to have Christ increase in us in all things until we attain to a full-grown man (v. 13).

Note for “Head” in verse 15 – *Head* here indicates that our growth in life by the increase of Christ should be the growth of the members in the Body under the Head.

Note for “Out from whom” in verse 16 – To grow in life is to grow into the Head, Christ, but to operate in the Body of Christ is to operate out from Him. First, we grow up into the Head; then we have something that is out from the Head for the building up of the Body.

Note for “joined” in verse 16 – *Joined* implies the thought of joining by fitting; knit implies the thought of interweaving.

Note for “joint” in verse 16 – *Every joint of the rich supply* refers to the specially gifted persons, such as those mentioned in v. 11.

Note for “the” in verse 16 – In Greek the article here is emphatic. Hence, *the* rich supply must be the particular supply, the supply of Christ.

Note for “operation” in verse 16 – Or, functioning. The same Greek word as in 3:7 and Col. 1:29, and of the same origin as *operations* in 1 Cor. 12:6.

Note for “each one part” in verse 16 – *Each one part* refers to each member of the Body. Through the growth in life and the development of gifts, each member of the Body of Christ has its own measure, which operates for the growth of the Body.

Note for “causes” in verse 16 – The Body of Christ causes the growth of itself through the supplying joints and the operating parts.

Note for “growth of the Body” in verse 16 – The growth of the Body of Christ is the increase of Christ in the church, which results in the building up of the Body by the Body itself.

Note for “love” in verse 16 repeated from verse 15 – This is not our own love but the love of God in Christ, which becomes the love of Christ in us, by which we love Christ and the fellow members of His Body. It is in such a love that we hold to truth, that is, to Christ with His Body, and are kept from being influenced by the winds of teaching and from bringing in elements that are foreign to the Body.

Discussion Questions

- What is the roll of each member of the Body in causing the growth of the Body of Christ?
- What specifically is increasing when verse 15 tells us that “we may grow up into Him”?
- What specifically is the outcome of the “operation in the measure of each one part”?