

Built Together – How?

We have begun to see how an important part of God's purpose in our lives is to **build us together** in fellowship in the Church – a 'household' of those who share in the new life that comes from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a 'house' in which God himself can make his home.

Last time, we had a look at the 'big picture' – how the way the Lord is working in our individual lives fits into how he is working in the Church, and how the way he is working in the Church here and now is both valuable for the present day **and** also training us for future responsibilities when he returns to this earth to reign.

So, the next question is obvious: **HOW** is he doing that ? Let's look at some important basics . . .

After Peter had made his momentous declaration, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*",¹ Jesus talked about 'my Church' and said that **HE** would build it, and he used an ordinary word that means 'to build a house'. Paul uses that same word, and others linked to it, not only to describe his own involvement in seeing the Church built, but also the way that **each member of the Church** is included in the building process! We'll look at that again in a minute.

We need to remember again that Jesus and Paul, when they speak about the Church, are speaking about those who have responded to the call of God and are in a real working relationship with him through their ongoing trust in the Lord Jesus and what he has done for them. They are not talking about people who have simply joined an organisation that may call itself a church. This building process is for those who are 'living stones' – those who have responded and have come to Jesus – and are being built up together as a spiritual house (**1 Peter 2:4-8**).

If you are **not** a 'living stone', it is **impossible** for you to be built into the Church. But, if you **are** a 'living stone', then you are not only **part of the house** but you are also **part of the building process**, however large, small, young or old you may be, and even if you feel insignificant, weak and ineffective.

OK, then, so how do we get involved in this building process? If you are joined to Jesus, then you already started being involved as soon as you started your new life in him! How?

On the Receiving End

We have looked at this before, but it's worth repeating. How did we first come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? We each have our own personal history, and probably no two experiences are the same, but there is a common factor for each one of us: a '**light-bulb moment**', a time when we began to say 'I see!' It may have actually been a brief moment, but it might equally have been a gradual process over time. Long or short, we came out of it with fresh appreciation of the reality of what God had done for us in Jesus, and our 'walk' with him began.

¹ **Matthew 16:13-20**

After that initial experience, most of us probably got involved in some form of 'Christian activity', maybe learning to pray, reading the Bible or going to meetings. Did these things help us to grow in our faith? Hopefully they did, but if they didn't do as much as we thought or expected, that may have made us feel a little discouraged or even disillusioned – until we receive another shaft of light which enables us to say 'I see!' again.

I believe that this is the essence of spiritual growth, and that the chief reason why we **do** benefit from our various activities is that they are often channels for this same process of real revelation – even in ways that may seem to be small and insignificant. And then we 'firm up' on what has just become real to us by speaking it out, perhaps just sharing what we have 'discovered' with another brother or sister. Paul describes this process in **Romans 10:8-13**.

You may be able to point to specific times in your life when this sort of fresh appreciation dawned on you quite suddenly and your life changed as a result. Or you may not! But, either way, you are able to say 'I see' about an ever-growing number of realities which the Lord has brought to you. You are growing!

These light-bulb moments can come when we are on our own, but they may often arrive when we are meeting with other believers. Something that someone says, a line from a song or some words from a Bible reading – something triggers fresh appreciation and we begin to see things differently. The Holy Spirit has been able to bring us forward by another step. Small, maybe, but moving forwards!

I have been careful to say 'appreciation' and not 'knowledge'. It is not always understanding of truth or factual information, though for me it often seems to be. Not everybody works in the same way! But when God speaks to us, the result is always **light**, in whatever way that works out in our lives. And it is light that enables us to move forward in our trusting relationship with him. *"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."* (**Psalms 119:130**)

It doesn't always feel so positive! Sometimes we need to be told things that we don't like to hear. Perhaps we have said or done something that has hurt someone else, whether by accident or on purpose, and either that person or another caring brother or sister has come to us to try to put things right, to encourage us to admit our fault and heal the broken relationship. It may not seem like 'revelation' in the same way, but the key point is when we realise what we have done and say 'Oh, I see!' Jesus describes the difficult process in **Matthew 18:15** onwards, and John describes it as learning to 'walk in the light' (**1 John 1:5-10**).

. . . and giving out as well as taking in . . .

We may have become so accustomed to receiving that we forget that each of us (yes, every single one who belongs to Jesus) has something to give 'into the mix', at least a small contribution that will help someone else to receive, perhaps just a simple word which will contribute to a 'light bulb moment' for them.

. . . which is where we come to ***Ephesians 4:7-16***. At first glance, this looks like a passage where Paul is writing about all the people with ‘special ministries’—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and how effective they are in the Church. But read on! Their effectiveness is shown by the effectiveness of ‘the saints’ – that’s us! – as we are equipped for the work of service which **builds up the body of Christ (v.12)** until all of us become mature with a true knowledge of Jesus, even ‘*to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*’ (v.13). Wow!

The results of this ‘building up’ are shown in **v.14-16**:—

1) We will no longer be like children (the word means infants who have not yet learned to talk!) and so will not be tossed around and susceptible to ‘every wind of teaching’, not tricked by man-made ideas and not manipulated by crafty and deceptive schemes (**v.14**).

2) Being totally truthful and genuine with each other, we shall ‘*grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ*’ (**v.15**). The word actually means ‘truthing’ – reality running through all that we do and are!

3) It’s from him that all this growth comes. The whole ‘body’ is ‘*fitted and held together through every joint of the supply, according to the proper working*’ (literally, ‘*working in measure*’) *of each individual part*’ and it is **the body itself** that ‘*causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*’ (**v.16**).

Have you noticed? It is not the job of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to do all this building up! Their job is to equip us so that the growth of the ‘body’ flows through the ‘body’ itself.

Are we functioning as ‘joints of the supply’? Is every part working properly, in the measure for which it is designed? If so, then **growth will be the result** as we share together. This is not just personal growth now, it is growth of the ‘body’, Christians who are joined together in fellowship.

Remember that word that Jesus used when he said ‘I will **build** my Church’ –? It’s a word that means ‘to build a house’, and we have already looked at the fact that we have been called out and called together to be a ‘house’ or a ‘temple’ in which God makes his home. Paul uses this word again here in **v.12 & 16**, when he is writing about the building up of the church as the ‘body’ of Christ. Two powerful pictures of the Church: **a house where God’s presence is found** and **a living body through which his life is expressed**. In both cases, very much in the real world, here and now!¹

Paul uses the same word again, and often, in **1 Corinthians 14**, where he is writing about meetings of the church in Corinth and the use of spiritual gifts in those meetings. For example, in **v.26**, he writes “*let everything be done for edification*.” It’s the same word, ‘building the house’! Every single thing that takes place in their meeting, says Paul, needs to be focused on that single objective, to see the Church – the ‘body’ of Christ there in Corinth – built up and growing healthily.

¹ For a more detailed study of this word, see *Building the House* from www.justonecandle.uk

In that same verse, he writes “*When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation . . .*” He clearly expected that the ‘body’ there would grow “*according to the working in measure of each individual part*”, just as he wrote to Ephesus!

This is not just about having good, effective and uplifting meetings, though obviously Paul longs to see that happening in Corinth, in Ephesus and in every place where Christians meet together . . .

As we saw last time in **Luke 19** and the parable of the minas, right now we are in a time of preparation, a time of training, for our future roles in the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns to this earth to reign. This is not some fairy tale, it will actually happen, and we shall be in the same position as the slaves in that parable – needing to give account to our ‘boss’ of how we have used the resources which he has entrusted to us. And receiving fresh responsibilities in his Kingdom, based on how we have used those resources!

In the light of this, as we look at our own personal spiritual growth and the growth of the Church together in fellowship, does it all begin to snap into a sharper focus?

Can we see that it is vital that we grow together in fellowship, **as those who belong to Jesus** and not simply as those who come to the same place every Sunday morning?

Can we find opportunities for this ‘building up’ process to increase? An informal home group meeting is often good place to start to share things that you feel the Lord may have shown you and which may be helpful to others in the group. And, of course, to be on the ‘receiving end’ of other people sharing. Things shared in the ‘safety’ of a small group like this may develop into things to be shared with the whole fellowship, for everyone’s benefit.

Can we see that our own growth is **essential** to enable us to be a properly working part of the ‘body’ of Christ and contribute to that growth?

Do we need to look again at the foundations in our own lives and make sure that we are learning to live lives that are based on the fact that our Father has placed us **in Christ** –? ¹

Vital foundations for real spiritual growth in our own lives, for the growing life of the Church – and for the coming kingdom!

Dave Taylor December 2024

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¹ For a series of studies on what it means to be ‘In Christ’, see ‘[By His Doing](http://www.justonecandle.uk)’ from www.justonecandle.uk (Talks given at Okehampton Baptist Church, October 2018 to January 2020 – notes and some recordings.)