

# The Gathered Church (6) - Gathered for Growth

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Date: 29 October 2023

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Let's worship God now. We sing to His praise in Psalm 95. Psalm 95 in the Scottish Psalter, and that's on page 357. The tune is Glasgow. As we were this morning, we're following the theme of the gathered church. We saw this morning the church gather together for praise, and especially with singing praise. Tonight we're looking at the church gather together for growth as we seek to grow, not just individually or numerically, but also spiritually, the growth that the Lord brings us as we wait on His blessing. So we'll sing these verses. O come, let us sing to the Lord. Come, let us, everyone, a joyful noise make to the rock of our salvation. Psalm 95 and these verses 1 to 6.

We'll stand if you can, please, just stand. Let us sing.

Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice.

Let us sing sound to him with praise and make a joyful noise.

For God, the great, God, the great King, above all gods he is.

[ 2 : 20 ] Exalt the earth, how in his hand the strength of his is.

To him the stanchiest seed he haunts, for he the same did me.

The pride and love so from his hands its form adversity.

O come and let us worship him.

Let us overcome with all. And on our knees before the Lord, our maker let us fall.

[ 3 : 51 ] Let's unite together now in prayer and calling upon the Lord. Our gracious and ever-blessed God, we have been gathered in your presence so many times before.

And yet we confess tonight our need of you as much as ever to lead us into your truth, to enable us, O Lord, once again to benefit not only from being gathered together, but also from our communion with you.

And we thank you, Lord, that that lies at the heart of our worship. At all times when we come together to worship you, our concern is to glorify your great name, to know you and to confess you as our Lord and as our God.

And we thank you for every opportunity we have to do so. As we come together, O Lord, to sing your praises. As we come together to join collectively in prayer. As we come to hear your word and your voice speaking to us through your word.

And as we come, Lord, at this time anew, and to share fellowship with each other and to be a means of encouraging one another, we thank you for the services of worship that we are always privileged to attend.

[ 5 : 05 ] Lord, help us, we pray, in all aspects of our worship, in dependence upon your Holy Spirit. Help us to listen to your voice. Help us to speak in such a way as declares your will in the preaching of the gospel.

Help us, Lord, in the interaction we have with each other, as speaker and hearers alike. Help us, for we need you, O Lord, to work in our hearts. For every aspect of our worship emanates from the hearts of your people.

And we give thanks tonight that we have this privilege, even of looking in and calling upon our very soul, to praise the Lord. We ask, O gracious God, that our meeting tonight will further equip us and benefit us for living in the world and for our growth as a people.

Help us, we pray, through these moments we are together, in conjunction with the times we spend individually with you. Help us, Lord, we pray, to grow together in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Help us, as we seek that spiritual development in our lives, that we may extend what we seek for individually to what we ought to seek for ourselves as a people, as a congregation.

[ 6 : 22 ] Give us, O Lord, the grace that will enable us to grow, to grow in our relationships, to grow in our interaction one with another, to grow in our concern, to be to the world a living light that shows forth the glory and the claims of Christ.

Lord, we give thanks tonight that it is our privilege to be able to look forward to doing this, even in the days that you spared us during the course of life. We ask for all the gatherings of your people tonight, wherever they are in the world, that you would bless them.

And that you would bless them, Lord, for that same benefit to be theirs that we pray for for ourselves. We ask, O God, tonight that your cause will advance. We pray and we bring to our children's notice as well the Lord's Prayer each and every passing Lord's Day.

When our prayer is in using these words, that your kingdom come, that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And we ask that you would continue, Lord, to provide for your church throughout the world the grace that would enable us to know the advance of your kingdom.

Lord, our God, we are so conscious in our day and generation of how much is ranged against your kingdom, how your kingdom is the target of so much assault from the forces of unbelief and even of evil.

[ 7 : 48 ] Lord, we pray that in our day our concern might be that wherever your people are, wherever your cause is set forth, that we may see, O Lord, the grace working in the lives of your people, that enable them not only to resist the powers of evil, but also to actually accomplish a victory over them.

And to be sure that the Lord on their side enables them to look forward to final victory after all is done. We ask your blessing to be with all who serve you in different capacities.

Lord, we as a congregation know that so many people of our number serve you in different ways in their lives through the course of each week. We pray that you would bless every witness to your grace that we seek to have set forth in our lives.

And we pray that for all the variety of gifts and of service that we represent, Lord, that you would be pleased to accompany all that with your blessing. We give thanks that we are able to show forth your glory in the world in which we are set.

And we pray that our concern might be to do that more fully and more clearly. And we pray tonight for all those, O Lord, who need you in a way that is specific, and especially those that face the difficulties and challenges of old age, of incapacity, of illness, of the failure of various faculties mentally and spiritually.

[ 9 : 19 ] And we pray for those, Lord, who have challenges in life over their concern with loved ones who may be ill, or even over their own illness as well. We pray for those who are seriously ill, for those who are terminally ill, for those who have been given the news that they are hastening toward the end of their life in this world.

Bless their families. Bless themselves, O Lord, whether they remain conscious to those outwardly or not. Yet we give thanks that you are able to reach to our inmost souls, that you are able to speak to us inwardly, even when, to all other accounts, we may not be conscious or able to converse with those around us.

Be merciful to them, we pray, as well as to all who have lost loved ones in recent times and in times gone by. Lord, we continue to bear them before you. We pray for all those who work with people who have different kinds of addiction.

Gracious One, we ask the blessing of the Lord to be with them. We pray for a road to recovery for David, as he works and heads up the work, Lord, for a road to recovery locally.

We pray for him and we pray for his work. We pray for all those who come under the benefit of being confronted with the Bible's teaching and seeking to help them along the road to recovery.

[ 10 : 42 ] Lord, we ask that your blessing will be with them. We pray too for safe families. We thank you for your provision for them thus far in our community here. We pray that you would bless them, each and all of them, who organize and head up the work.

And we ask that you would continue to bless the families that are being helped, O Lord, through the work of safe families, not only here, but in other parts of our nation as well.

And we give thanks for the opportunities given to come alongside people, to help them in their distress, in their need, and in lives that are so deprived for various reasons of things that we have in abundance.

We do ask your blessing, Lord, for all who help with pregnancy crisis, for all those who help, those who have that situation in life also to face and contend with.

O Lord, may your blessing be with Elizabeth and all others who help her with that work. As it goes on quietly, we give thanks, O Lord, for them. We pray that it will continue to be effective.

[ 11 : 48 ] And we ask for all those who are helped by it, that they will come to realize, O Lord, your goodness, realize your willingness to come to receive them to yourself and to come to be their Lord and God and protector also.

We ask for our nation, Lord, at this time. We pray that you bless us in times of great trouble and crisis and questionings. And we do pray that you bless those in authority over us in government.

Lord, be pleased, we pray, to bless them nationally and locally. Be pleased to bless our schools, our teachers, the education authority. We ask your blessing for our medical practices, for our hospitals, for our hospitals.

Lord, we ask that you would continue to provide them with all that is necessary for their well-being. And we pray that in difficulties financially and in other ways, that you would continue, Lord, to provide for them and give those who are in charge of all of these areas of our public life, give them, Lord, the grace and the mercy that would daily feed them with wisdom from above.

We ask, O Lord, too, that you would continue to bless our children, our young people. Be near to them, we pray. Remember the fellowship tonight. And Marianne, as she speaks, we pray for your blessing upon our young folk, our children and young people, and we commit them to you.

[ 13 : 19 ] We ask, O Lord, for the troubled parts of the world in this day. We pray for the situation in the Middle East. Lord, our God, there is so much that lies beyond even our capacity to pray about it, except that we can bring it before you and ask, Lord, that you would intervene, that you would come, Lord, to bring peace to these troubled parts of the world and help the people of Ukraine as well when they presently may have fallen out of the news through other things coming to take prominence.

We pray for them. We ask that you would continue to bless them in their struggles against oppression. We ask that they may see, O Lord, your own hand at work.

And when we find, Lord, so much in our world to do with refugees and people moving from one nation to another and coming into our own land, Lord, sometimes we feel perplexed that the pressures brought to bear upon various nations and our own.

And yet we also recognize, O Lord, it is your providence and we recognize that much may be going on even behind the scenes that we know not of where you are bringing home to people in distress their need of God.

And we do pray that that will be so even amongst the vast number of people throughout the world who are displaced. Help us to learn from your word from such times as happened in the past that we may know from that that God is very often at work where we least expect.

[ 14 : 54 ] And we pray that it may be so in our own age as well. Continue with us now, we pray. Hear our prayers and pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's sing again to God's praise.

This time we're singing from Psalm 31. Psalm number 31. Psalm 31. And verses 19 to 24. That's on page 37.

June this time is Wareham. Your goodness, Lord, is very great, prepared for those who fear your name. You show your goodness openly to all who your protection claim.

Your presence hides and shelters them from those who plot to take their life. And in your tent you keep them safe from evil tongues that stir up strife.

Verses 19 to 24. Your goodness, Lord, is very great. your goodness, Lord, is very great.

[ 16 : 04 ] Prepare for those to hear your name. You show your goodness openly to all who your protection claim.

your presence. Your presence, Lord, and shelters them from those who plot to take their life.

and in your tent and in your tent you keep them safe. Your people say all people touch and stare at strife.

the Lord the Lord be praised because he showed the wonder of his love to me.

when in the city I was struck surrounded by the enemy.

[ 17 : 49 ] in my alarm I rush to say that I was hidden from your eyes from your eyes but when I call to you for help in grace to listen to my cries O love the Lord the Lord all human saints a faithful will be kept by God but he will give the power their true each strong day heart

O thank the Lord let's turn now to read God's word we're reading tonight from Ephesians Paul's letter to the Ephesians and chapter 4 verses 1 to 16 Ephesians chapter 4 from the beginning chapter 5 verse 1 to 16 I therefore a prisoner for the Lord urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness with patience forbearing with one another in love eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace there is one body and one spirit just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call one Lord one faith one baptism of the one God and Father of all who is over all who is over all and through all and through all and in all but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift therefore it says when he ascended on high he led a host of captives and the and he gave gifts to men and he gave gifts to men and he gave gifts to men and he gave gifts to men and saying he ascended what does it mean but that he had also did not be the one hope that he had been given to the one hope that belongs to your call one Lord one faith one baptism one God and father of all who is over all and through all and through all and in all but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift therefore it says when he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men and saying he ascended what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth he who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things and he gave the apostles the prophets the evangelists the pastors and teachers to equip the saints to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ till 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 so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning by craftiness and deceitful schemes rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way unto him who is the head into Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped when each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love and we pray God will bless reading of his word with his own blessing before we turn to that passage let's sing again this time psalm 115 115 that's on page 153 singing to a tune Denfield from verse 9

O house of Israel place your trust upon the Lord alone he is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own O house of Aaron trust the Lord he is their help and shield all you who fear him trust the Lord he is your help and shield the Lord remembers Israel and he will bless us all the house of Aaron and all those who fear him great and small may God the Lord make you increase both you and all your line may you be blessed by God who makes all things by his design and we'll sing to the end of verse 18 from verse 9 O house of Israel place your trust upon the Lord alone O house of Israel place your trust upon the Lord alone He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own so that you and all are his own

He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own and all who are his own He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own He is the mighty help and shield of all who are his own.

O hearts of Aaron, trust the Lord. He is their help and shield.

[ 23 : 25 ] All you who fear him, trust the Lord. He is your help and shield.

The Lord remembers Israel, and he will bless us all.

The hearts of Aaron, and all those who fear him great and small.

May God the Lord make you in peace. All due and all you are divine.

May you be blessed by God who makes all things by his design.

[ 24 : 37 ] The highest tempts we long to know. The earth to us he gave.

It's not the dead who hates the Lord. There's silent in the grave.

May we extol the Lord on high, his majesty proclaim.

O now and ever, O next song, and which is holy name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Let's turn now for a short time to Ephesians chapter 4. We're going to look especially at verses 15 and 16.

[ 25 : 50 ] the Lord, which, of course form part of this great passage all the way through these verses from the beginning of the chapter, really. But especially from verse 11, where he speaks about Jesus having equipped and equipping the church with various types of leaders, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so on.

But you notice it's to equip the saints. All that ministry is to equip the saints, that's all the people of God, for the work of ministry. And that's not just the ministry of the gospel in terms of a minister's work.

Ministry there really refers to the whole ministry of the church for which the Lord equips us, so that as we go forth in His name, we are equipped by Him for the tasks that He has called us to.

So, it comes in verse 14 then to say that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and so on. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him or unto Him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, efficiently, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Well, as you know, the human body is used by Paul as a very useful illustration of certain features of the church. He uses it elsewhere, and he's using it here, as you can see, as an image for the church, because the human body, for Paul, is illustrative of various features of the church and various ways in which the church not only acts together, but actually is a body spiritually acting towards the world and towards God Himself as well, that spiritual body.

[ 27 : 46 ] So, when Paul is thinking about such things, for example, as unity and diversity together, in other words, all the various gifts that God has gifted the church with, he's mentioned that here, that the Lord, when He ascended up on high, led a host of captives.

He gave gifts to men. The ascension of the Lord, the exaltation of the Lord, was so that from that, gifts would come to the church by the Holy Spirit, so that that diversity of gifts, that whole range of gifts, is nevertheless itself sits alongside and indeed in many ways contributes to the unity that Paul speaks about, that unity of which we are one body in Christ with all the variety of gifts within that one body.

So, when he's thinking of unity and diversity together, he finds the human body to be very illustrative and useful for that. Or you could say that when he talks here as well about development and growth, he can say that the human body as you see it is also very illustrative of the spiritual growth and the moral growth that God enables His church to grow in and grow by, just as a human body develops from early stage through to maturity, so as a body, the church in every generation grows, until finally the whole church will be complete in the presence of God in glory.

And it's also important that we see his illustration of the body, the human body, as illustrative of the spiritual body, with a reference to the head of the body.

And as we'll see tonight, it's from our head, from our brain, through the various parts of the body, that in many ways the body is controlled. And what he's saying is that that's true spiritually of the church, because the head of the church is Jesus Himself.

[ 29 : 45 ] It is Christ. That's what he's saying here. From whom, verse 16, the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In other words, that growth, that capacity for growth, that enabling of growth comes from the head, comes from Christ. The controlling of the body is Christ Himself, as He's the head of the church.

And from that, we can see quite a number of things develop. The body will grow, verse 11 here, he says, where he's saying the growth of the body.

He gave all these different functions to people in the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry, until he says in verse 13, 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.

Now, some people take it that that's a reference to the church even in this world, that it goes on maturing or growing. But I think it's better to see that Paul is looking towards the final growth, the final maturity of the church in glory, where it will perfectly be in the image or in conformity to Christ Himself.

[ 31 : 07 ] And it's an interesting thing that you think of of the church corporately, the whole of the church, all of God's people united together, that it's as a whole body, he's speaking here, of them conforming to Christ.

We tend to think about individual conformity to Christ, and indeed that's perfectly proper. The Bible teaches that. But it's another dimension, really, isn't it? When you think of the whole church in its final state of maturity and glory, that that itself, in a mysterious way, but a wonderful way, is conformity to Christ Himself in His exalted glory.

The final likeness to Himself. But you see, while we may take it that way, He still takes us back to the meantime, where He says in verse 14, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning and craftiness in deceitful schemes.

In other words, the powers that we face, as they are themselves fueled by the satanic, by the dark forces that exist in the universe, how do we face these?

How are we equipped in order to not only face them, but to overcome them or to resist them? Well, He says, by together growing unto the Lord.

[ 32 : 37 ] It's possible, of course, that you need to resist and to overcome the powers, these evil powers for yourself as a Christian, for us individually. But this is talking corporately.

This is talking of the church as a body. And one of the beauties and one of the privileges of belonging to the church is that you're not on your own as you face these powers. It's the church as a body, the church together.

And we're following this theme for a few studies of the gathered church, the church in its gatheredness, its togetherness, if you like. And it's also applicable then to this particular point of facing the powers that are ranged against the church.

And it's clear from verses 11 to 16, we're going to come to verse 15 in a minute, but this just feeds into it. It's clear from these verses, from verse 11 onwards, that the apostle is really speaking of what we might call our togetherness.

Our togetherness under the headship of Christ, in the togetherness with which we are required to grow and for which God enables that growth through the ministry of the gospel, the ministry of his word, and the ministry of believers together, one to another.

[ 33 : 53 ] And so let's come to see what he's saying now in verse 15 and 16. A couple of things I'm going to focus on from these two verses. First of all, what he means by growing up unto the head who is Christ.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way unto him who is the head, even Christ or into Christ. That's the first thing.

A number of things he mentions under that. Secondly, each part contributes to the whole body's growth. It says there, from whom the whole body is joined together.

But he says, when each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Now, it is a complex passage, and I'm not going to try and open up some of the phrases, the particular phraseology in it.

I want to keep our minds focused on the central emphasis of growing spiritually under the direction and in relation to Christ and to each other, and how the gathered church, even in its gatherings such as this, is a church that gathers to enable that growth to take place through the blessing of Christ, through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit.

[ 35 : 14 ] So, growing up unto Christ, you see what he's saying here? Rather, speaking the truth in love. Instead of actually caving in, if you like, or being tossed to and fro by these different doctrines and human cunning and craftiness and the deceitful schemes that we face instead, he says, rather than that, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up unto him.

What does he mean by the truth? Well, he means far more than just not telling lies to each other, important though that is. By the truth, he means what God has actually revealed of himself, of his salvation.

The whole revelation of God, as you find it, actually set out in the Bible. The truth of God, truth about God himself, the truth about salvation, truth about ourselves, who we are, what we're like, where we came from, all of the things the Bible reveals, in fact, you could say, that is God's truth revealed to us, God's revealed truth.

And it's objective. It's absolute truth. It's independent, if you like, of our input. We didn't produce it. And we have to remember that in our day as well.

The truth is not what people think it should be. The truth is not what people would want the Bible to say rather than what it says. The truth is not God's truth adapted, as it were, from generation to generation to fit in with what human beings think it ought to say.

[ 36 : 47 ] The truth is here. The truth is objective. The truth is absolute. It's unchanging truth because it's God's truth. Because it reflects God's character and God's will and God who is Himself truth.

And so, that objective, absolute truth, is really what we are to take as what he means here. Rather, speaking the truth in love.

And that takes us to think of, as we're thinking of, the truth as not being, and you can say, the truth is not actually religion. The truth is not any particular holy book.

The truth is not humanism. The truth is not secularism. The truth is not any of these things. The truth is God's revealed will as you have it in the Scriptures.

But then, what does he mean by speaking the truth in love to each other? Well, that takes us to the word speaking. Because actually, the word speaking is more than just speech or conversation.

[ 37 : 57 ] The word speaking actually means something like holding to or showing the truth of God. In other words, what he's talking about is our lives.

Our lives as they are together, as we form the church, as we form the body of Christ in this world under the headship of Christ, we are to be showing the truth. We are to be holding the truth.

We are to actually show that the truth is meaningful to us. Our lives have to be truthful in the sense, not just free of lies, but truthful in presenting the truth.

There's a word which isn't very, it isn't very elegant, but nevertheless, it kind of captures what we're at here, that your life has to be a truthing life.

Truthing in the sense of showing the truth, living for the truth, standing for the truth, presenting the truth, commending the truth, all of the things that are to do with holding the truth and showing forth the truth in your life.



[ 39 : 00 ] But it's not just in your life individually, what he's saying here is this is actually something not just for the believer, but for believers together, for the people of God as the body of Christ.

They are to hold and show out the truths of God in love in their lives. In other words, this is actually speaking about our whole way of life together, our relationships together, how we live together, how we relate to each other, how we speak to each other, how we listen to each other, how we care for each other, how we show our care for each other.

You see, the gathered church, the togetherness of God's people, as we said at the beginning, is a togetherness through which the truth must be shown, through which the truth comes to be seen, not only among themselves, but to the world out there.

It's together as His body that we are to live out God's truth. And you can only do that as we gather together, as we meet together, as we relate meaningfully to each other, as we have fellowship with one another and with God, and together as we meet and have fellowship with God in that.

What are you saying? Rather, speaking, holding forth. It involves speaking, of course, but it's not confined to that. Speaking the truth, but He's saying, in love.

[ 40 : 26 ] That's such a vital, vital part of His emphasis there. We're not just to be caring for each other, speaking to each other, showing out the truth of God and how we live.

We are to do that in love. That's such an important consideration, isn't it? In fact, it really is to be, as it were, put on over all the other parts of the garments we wear spiritually.

Put on truth, is what He says in Colossians. Putting on this over all the other parts of the spiritual garments that you wear. Put on love.

See verse 18 there, the very end of the verse there, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Remember that as a spiritual body, we are always visible.

And just like parts of your natural body, your human body, when one part is affected in some way, either positively or mostly negatively, if it's hurt, the rest of the body actually feels that.

[ 41 : 36 ] The rest of the body is affected by that. And it's the same way spiritually, because as Paul thinks of the human body as being illustrative of the spiritual body that we are together, what he is saying, we are to grow in love, we are to exercise our relationships one with another in love, because there's a watching world out there for one thing.

Not only does it affect other parts of the body, but the one thing that a real turn off of the world is when Christians are seen not to love each other. That was one of the great confessions made by the world in the apostles' own day.

Behold how they love each other. Look at how they love each other. These were pagan people watching the church, watching these people of God, watching these Christians as they met, as they went about their business from day to day, as they met together, as they related to each other, as they spoke out to the world around them.

They loved each other. They were able to put up with so much because they valued the headship of Christ, the spirit of Christ, because they loved each other. Our spiritual body, or we as a spiritual body, are intensely visible to the world.

And while you want that world out there to be changed, people to be converted, people to come to join the spiritual body of Christ that we are, nevertheless, you know of their opposition.

[ 43 : 11 ] You know how difficult they make it at times. You pray for them, and yet so much comes your way by hostility, by opposition, by refusals. And when you widen that into the situation that we face in our society today, you can see how difficult it is in the present climate to live consistently, not just as a Christian, but as a Christian church together in the way we relate to each other so that our love for each other is made plain and made effective to the world.

But that's what Paul is saying. There should be no place at all for cold orthodoxy. You know, it's perfectly easy to be very orthodox in your doctrine and yet be as cold as ice in your relationship to your fellow Christians.

Well, that orthodoxy is very ineffective, and in fact, that orthodoxy is very off-putting to the world and even to other Christians too. Yes, of course, we need orthodoxy, but there should be no place for a cold type.

No, there should be any place for what you might call as denominational pride. When we compare ourselves with other denominations, and when we say that the church at large in some ways is defective or has left the truth of God as you find that in various places throughout our nation, throughout the world, that doesn't mean that we hold ourselves up in pride and preen ourselves as if we were the best of the best.

Nor does it mean that we give place for a moment to any party spirit even within a congregational setting. That's what was wrong to a great extent in Corinth.

[ 44 : 59 ] People were saying, oh, I am of Apollos. Others were saying, no, no, I'm of Cephas. He's my man. I'm his follower. What others were saying, no, I'm not of Cephas.

I'm not of Apollos. That's far too low for me. I am of Christ. I'm superior to that. I belong to that group who put Christ first. Be done with your Cephas and with your Apollos.

They're just human beings. What does Paul say to them? Is Christ divided? Are we a body of Christ?

He is saying, are you a body of Christ? To the Corinthians, are you a body of Christ? And yet, going about with all these divisions among you, what's wrong with you? Because you're not speaking the truth in love.

You're not holding the truth in love. You have intense rivalries. You're competing with each other. And even the disciples, of course, well, we can follow them because it's just our own heart after all that is revealed through them, isn't it?

[ 46 : 03 ] On their way there to the Passover, on their way as Jesus made His way ultimately to the cross, what were they talking about? Well, they weren't talking. They were actually disputing. And they were disputing which of them would be the greatest.

Apostles, disciples, called by Jesus to be His followers, to be His witness to the world, to be His witness in the truth. And they're disputing, they're squabbling over which was going to be the greatest.

Who's going to have the highest place? And Jesus is saying, be done with that. That's not my church. That's not my body. That's what we're not.

That's what we're, that's not what we're called to be and to do in our relations to each other. But, holding the truth, showing the truth, living the truth in love.

In love. And, elsewhere, he shows, as he does in this chapter itself later on, how they are to be quite different to the pagan world around them.

[ 47 : 14 ] He says, verse 20, this is not the way you have learned Christ. So, put off your old self, your former manner of life, and as corrupt through the deceitful desires, be renewed in the spirit of your mind.

Put on the new self. Put away falsehood. Speak the truth with your neighbor. Verse 25, be angry. Do not sin. Let not the sun go down on your anger.

Give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal. Rather, let him labor. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth. Only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion.

Don't grieve the spirit of God. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

But don't let the chapter break, put you off. You have to go into the next verse. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

[ 48 : 21 ] When he's saying there, be imitators of God. Seek to be as like God as it's possible to be in this life. Walk in love as beloved children.

What does he mean by that? Children already loved by God. Beloved in that sense. Reflect, he's saying, that love as you speak the truth in love.

As you live out the truth in love. Let love be preeminent. Let love be on the top of your agenda. Let love to one another and love for God dominate your life. That's really what he's saying.

Rather, speaking the truth in love. And you see how that fits into our gathering together from time to time. But even as we leave such gatherings as we're involved with today and you go out, you still remain the body of Christ, united together in Christ.

And so as parts of that body, as members of that body, as you live in the world, this is the world's, this is to be the world's view of us.

[ 49 : 26 ] So growing up unto Christ means in the truth and speaking or living out the truth and doing that in love. And we are to grow up, he says, up in every way unto him who is the head unto Christ.

From each part, secondly, each part contributes to the body's growth overall. Now we've said already, from whom, in verse 16, the whole body, from Christ, from whom the whole body receives its nourishment, you might say.

That means that our growth has a source. Our growth is fueled by the grace of Christ. He is himself the source of what enables us to grow together and to be in our relationships together what we ought to be.

Verses, verse 7, verse 11, and all the way through verse 7 to 10 here, what we're seeing is that we don't grow from our own competency, from our own ability.

There's not a self-produced growth. It's a growth that comes through the grace of Christ being channeled into our souls, into our life together, into our life individually.

[ 50 : 48 ] And that's why the head is so important as the source from which we receive all our nourishment and all our ability. That, of course, carries with it. I'm just saying this in passing.

It's a point that's come to me. It means that in passing you maintain and I maintain our individual relationship with Christ. Otherwise, that's going to be reflected in the quality or lack of it of the whole body in its growth.

But what he says here then goes on to say, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped. Literally, it's saying by every joint of the supply.

Very complex phrases he uses and I'm not going to try and open them up. It would take a lot of time. When each part is working properly makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

And I think it's best really if we think of again our human body which he's actually using anyway as an illustration. Think of the different parts and functions of these parts in our human body.

[ 51 : 55 ] There are limbs. There are bones. There are joints. There are muscles. There's the skin. There are ligaments. Every part of your body physically as it's joined together marvelously in God's creation.

There are bones fit into various sockets here and there. The arms, the legs, they're tied to the trunk of your body, your neck, all of these things. All of these parts of the body are fitted together so that they function.

Each of them has its own function but each contributes to the whole working of the body. But not only that, over all of these parts such as the bones and the flesh and the sinews and so on, you have two communicating you might say two communicating systems.

The communication that comes from the head is communicated to the rest of the body even to the tiniest bits of the tip of your finger through the nervous system.

And the nervous system is what carries the messages of the brain through to these parts of the body by which they are then enabled to function. That's why when something goes wrong with any part of your body or when something goes wrong with the brain itself, sadly at times and the messages don't reach parts of the body with various diseases, sadly, that you see, some parts of the body cease to function properly.

[ 53 : 30 ] They're not getting the right signals. That particular overlay, if you like, of the nervous system has ceased to function as it should. But there's another system as well that's necessary for the overall good of the body and again it reaches every single part of the body and what is it?

It is, of course, the vascular system, the system that conveys blood throughout the body to all parts of the body. And when you think of all of these and how they illustrate the spiritual body that we are together as we seek to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, as we are the church in this world together, the gatherer church, the church as it functions in the world, so the different parts of the body, the different types of gifts that Christ has endowed his church with, they all function by virtue of receiving from the head all the abilities, all the grace, all the nourishment that these parts of the body require.

And whether we're involved in preaching the gospel or whether you're involved in working with young people, teaching in the Sunday school, being involved with the youth club, being involved with working with older people, whether you're actually working with people who have addictions, people who are ill, people who have severe disease, whatever it is, it's through the grace of Christ that you're enabled to actually carry out these duties effectively.

But that means that each and every part of the body must be working properly. That's why your relationship individually with Christ is so important. The various parts of the body, each is different in many ways, as you can see in your physical body.

There's a huge difference between your little toe and your nose or your neck and parts of your legs. But they all have the same supply.

[ 55 : 34 ] The nervous system and the blood supply supplies each and all of them. And what does that actually mean? Well, it means the end result is that from Jesus the body is held together by every joint of the supply, the supply that comes from Him.

When each part is working properly, it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. So three points just to make by way of a final application.

There's so much else that we could say, but the time is gone and a lot of these things would take time to open up further. I hope you've got the main gist of the passage and what it's saying to us by way of our need to grow and the privilege of growing together spiritually under Christ's direction and under Christ's enabling.

But the three points I want to finish with are these. Firstly, each part must have a living connection with the head. Each part must have a living connection with the head because Paul is reminding us that the body's functions, the spiritual body's functions are as each part is working properly.

Tonight, you and I have to ask ourselves, do I have a living connection with Jesus? I have a connection with him formally, you might say, because I belong to his church outwardly, because I form part of those people who worship him regularly in Stornoway Free Church.

[ 57 : 14 ] But then I have to ask myself, do I have more than the ability to speak such as it is? Do I have more than being able to stand in front of people and say certain things for a certain amount of time?

What is my own connection to Christ? And you have to say that of yourself. Do I have a living connection with Jesus? Is there grace?

Is there power? Is there ability? Is there life flowing from Jesus into my soul and into my life? Am I a living part of this body that meets from time to time and seeks to worship the Lord as we do tonight?

See, how vital that is for yourself and for myself. To really ask ourselves, whatever age we're at, it's true of young folks as well as old, that we have to have a living connection with the head.

A living connection with Jesus himself. Because the passage as we've seen speaks about Jesus and his being ascended up into the heavens.

[ 58 : 21 ] In other words, Jesus has died, he's risen from the dead, he's shown his power, he's exercised his power, that power is in him as he is now seated at God's right hand. And it's to that that we look as the head of the church that supplies us.

But you and I have to look individually at it as well and ask ourselves, am I one of these people? Am I just turning up every Sunday? Do I have something more than just habit or good habit though it might be?

So if you're here tonight and you know that you're not yet saved and you want to be saved, surely, you want to be a living part of this body of Christ, you want to be able to function spiritually, effectively, to contribute your own contribution and to receive from Jesus the life you know you need.

Well, here is God saying to you, firmly but gently, make sure that you're connected vitally, savingly, spiritually, in a life-receiving way with me.

And you do that by not trying to make yourself better than you are so that you then come to be joined to him, you just cast yourself upon him. And you say, Lord, I cannot do you, I cannot do it except as I am joined to you.

[ 59 : 48 ] I can't save myself. I need you to save me. I need you to be my head, my Lord, my Savior. Please receive me.

Please forgive my sins. Please give me a meaningful place in your living body. The second thing is, each part is important to that body and needed by the body and affects all the other parts.

You see, you mustn't say tonight that, well, I'm not really important, I shouldn't see myself as a significant part of the whole body because I don't have the capacity of others, I don't have the ability of others, I don't have such things as I see in other people who serve the Lord.

I'm just a tiny wee fragment, just forget about me. I don't need to commit myself fully. I don't have what it takes anyway. Never say that about yourself. Never think you're insignificant to God.

If we were insignificant to God, would He have sent His Son to die the death of the cross? When you see old stonework with a large lintel, maybe on top of a doorway or a gate, and you look at that lintel and you ask yourself, is that the most important stone in this opening, in this entrance?

[ 61 : 17 ] And of course, your immediate reaction is, well, yes, it's strong, it's holding up a lot of other stones. It's really there to take the weight, if you like, of everything that's above it. Yes, but you look under the stone, there are little wedges, little stone slices or wedges that have been carefully set in a particular place and carefully by a stonemason or whoever built it.

And it is these that keep the large stone balanced from moving as they're placed in under the large lintel stone. And these little stones are just as vital to the whole gateway as the lintel that you see prominently.

So it is in the church. It's not the people that you see prominently in the work of Jesus alone that are important to the work. You are too. Even if you're not seen and visible and prominent in the church, even if you're just worshiping Him, loving Him, showing your love for Him, praying to Him for yourself, praying that God will bless His church and His cause, well, you're needed in the church.

You're valuable to the church. Christ Himself says of you, you're not insignificant. I have a work for you as well as for the minister and all those who might be more prominent.

So each part must have a living connection with the head. each part is important and needed and affects every other part, either positively or negatively.

[ 62 : 55 ] And finally, the whole body, we're persuaded today, surely the whole body needs the reviving power of Christ. We can never say, and we certainly cannot say, of the days in which we live that the church is greatly empowered in the things of the gospel.

as you look at your own life, as I look at mine, certainly as I look at mine, I have to say, Lord, I need to be revived. I need to be quickened. I need Your Holy Spirit just to lift me, to give me a refreshment in my soul.

And the church, too, needs that. And only God can do that. I don't do it by organizing things. I don't do it by conferences, by committees, all of which are very good in their own place, all of which are necessary.

The life of the church is from the head. The life and enabling of the church is from Christ through His Spirit. And it runs, then, through every part of the body when it's functioning properly, so that it edifies, it builds itself up in love.

Well, we pray that God will bless these thoughts on His Word. Let's conclude by singing to His praise. And our final singing is in Psalm 92. Psalm 92, and it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 353.

[ 64 : 31 ] And singing verses 12 to the end of the psalm. But like the palm tree, flourishing shall be the righteous one. He shall like to the cedar grove that is in Lebanon.

Those that within the house of God are planted by His grace. They shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place. And you see again through these verses the togetherness of God's people as His church.

Those, plural, planted within the house of God. So let's sing these verses in conclusion, but like the palm tree, flourishing. Amen. But like the palm tree, flourishing shall be the righteous one.

He shall like to the cedar grove that is in Lebanon.

those that within the hearts of God are planted by His grace.

[ 66 : 03 ] they shall grow up and flourish all in our God's holy place.

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To show that upright is the Lord, he is our God to be.

And he from all the righteousness is all to ever be.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door here to my right. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

[ 67 : 45 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 70 : 16 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 72 : 46 ] Thank you.