

THERFIELD CHAPEL

Sunday 26 March 2006 6:30

Ephesians 1: 15-23

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. [17] I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. [18] I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, [20] which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. [22] And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I don't know how many of you are foolish enough to embark on ambitious DIY projects at home. I go in fits and starts myself - sometimes I'll get really enthusiastic and spend an entire weekend demolishing a wall, ripping out a fireplace or rebuilding a window frame. And at other times I'll spend weeks staring at a kitchen cupboard door that's a bit wonky, and not even be bothered to get a screwdriver out to tighten up the hinge!

One thing I have discovered, though, is what DIY actually stands for ... any suggestions? In my book, DIY stands for Don't Involve Yourself!

But if you are a follower of the DIY religion, your beliefs and practises are well catered for at many temples. These have names like B&Q and Homebase. They are open every day of the week and you will always find other believers in there, worshipping the latest laminate flooring or repenting of the fact that they chose the matt emulsion last week when the silk emulsion is on special offer this week.

And there's no end to the devotion of these DIY worshippers: you will find them queuing for upto half an hour just to make their offerings at the checkouts!

And they're not just there on Sundays: you'll often find them popping in for a mid-week service or even a brief visit on their way home from work. Such devotion is very touching!

And they have an evangelical zeal which puts us to shame. They are always discussing their religion with other people - often to the point of being able to talk about nothing else. They will open up their homes to their friends and work colleagues just in order to share

their miraculous transformation of the bedroom or the bathroom. And their friends are impressed with this witness. They look with admiration at the shiny new granite kitchen worktops and immediately resolve to go and do likewise. And so the gospel of DIY is spread throughout the community and the country - until we are all united and committed to making our homes look identical, and just like they look in the brochures.

But it's what happens in B&Q at night, when the worshippers have gone and the lights are out that is even more exciting. Everything in the store wakes up! Everything has its own personality and voice. Can you imagine the conversations?

Two rolls of wallpaper next to each other on the shelf have been giving each other secretive glances for quite a while but without saying anything. Until one of them breaks the silence and says to the other:

- *You wallpaper then?*
- *Sure am, says the other roll.*
- *Hmm. I did wonder, says the first, so where are your pink roses?*
- *What pink roses?*
- *Well I've got pink roses - I thought all wallpaper had pink roses.*
- *Nah, not me, says the other, I've got a neat red cheque pattern.*
- *Oh ... you sure you're wallpaper then?*
- *Of course I'm wallpaper - it's you that's different!*
- *OK, well how long are you?*
- *I'm 25-foot when unrolled and 24" wide.*
- *Blimey, so am I !! What paste you use then?*
- *Solvite Universal.*
- *Me too! Cor blimey you really are wallpaper after all. Still not sure about that pattern though. Still think you should have pink roses.*
- *Maybe, maybe not, says the other. I quite like your pink roses actually, and I bet you look fabulous in the bedroom. I reckon my red cheque pattern would look good in the kitchen myself.*
- *You're right, says the pink-rose wallpaper - you would look good there!*

And so the two rolls of wallpaper become friends, realising that their similarities are greater than their differences and that they actually complement each other and have their own very special place in the home.

But then they look across the aisle of B&Q and see the tins of paint. They find it hard not to giggle.

- *Might look OK on the woodwork, says one roll, but you wouldn't want it on the walls!*
- *Quite right, says the other wallpaper, stifling a laugh - who would want THAT on their walls?!*
- *Oi! Shouts the paint. I heard that! I'm good on walls too you know!*
- *In your dreams! shout the two rolls of wallpaper. You stick to the ceilings and woodwork mate, and leave the walls to us!*

- Fair enough. Be like that! says the paint. *But don't come crying to me when you're peeling off the bathroom wall after a couple of steamy showers!*

- Hmm whispered the wallpapers to each other - *he might have a point.* But they don't admit that to the paint and just carry on talking to themselves.

Over in the garden section of the store, there had been a bit of a stand-off between the concrete slabs and the new delivery of wooden decking. At first they were fighting about who gets to cover the ground and who looks best. The row had gone on for ages but they had reached some kind of compromise whereby the decking would be allowed in the back garden, as it looked more natural, and the concrete slabs would stay at the front of the house so that the house-owner had somewhere to park his car. Neither of them felt particularly happy about the outcome of this compromise, but they decided to leave it there, since they would never see each other again or speak to each other.

Over in another section of the store a fierce debate had been raging between an electric drill, a pair of pincers, a hammer and a tube of Polyfilla. The subject of the debate was the Doctrine of Holes.

- I drill holes, said the drill.

- Well technically you don't, squeaked the pincers. *Technically you drill wood and metal, and when you've finished, a hole is left as the result.*

- No, said the drill, *I drill HOLES - it says so on the box!*

- That's just your interpretation, said the pincers. *The hole doesn't exist until you've drilled the material.*

- Pointless argument anyway, said the hammer. *I can knock nails into walls without the need for holes!*

- And I wish you wouldn't, said the pincers. *I then have to go round pulling them out again!*

- Surely, said the Polyfilla, *in this modern age we have no use for holes anyway. I have devoted my life to filling holes and cracks and leaving a nice smooth surface everywhere. That's the way ahead.*

And the arguments across the store continued all through the night. Every item in B&Q seemed to be arguing with the other, claiming to be better or of more use. Some items were even denying that other items had a right to be there at all. The noise of the arguments built to such a volume that no-one noticed that it was nine o'clock in the morning and a customer had come into the store. The customer was astonished to hear all the tools, paints, wallpapers, floor coverings, fixtures and fittings arguing with each other.

STOP! He shouted. Do you not realise that I can use each and every one of you in the right way and in the right place to build a magnificent home? You all have your purpose! It's only when I use you as I see fit that you will realise that you are all part of the grand design. I have bought each and every one of you. Unite together under my plan and you will see what a beautiful thing I can make.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. [16] And if the ear should say, "Because I am

not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. (1 Cor. 12:15-16)

"You are the body of Christ" says St Paul in 1 Cor. 12:27, "and each one of you is a part of it."

And that message is, in a sense, the culmination or focal point of tonight's passage in Ephesians. [22] *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Just to let you know what I'm up to - I intend to start tonight's passage at the end, then to jump back to the start, and then to finish in the middle!

So it's helpful to look at those last two verses first. *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

To understand what Paul means, we need to go back to the basic theme of his letter. As it stands, the world was and is in complete disunity. Disunity between Jew and Gentile, between Greek and barbarian; disunity between different men within the same nation; disunity even within every man - where good struggles with the evil; there is disunity between man and nature; and, above all, there is disunity between man and God. It is Paul's message that Jesus died to bring all the discordant elements in this universe into one, to wipe out the separations, to reconcile man to man and to reconcile man to God. Jesus Christ is, above all things, God's instrument of reconciliation.

Christ died to bring all things and all men into one family. But, clearly, that unity does not as yet exist. It is only in Jesus that all people can become one; but before that can happen people must know about Jesus. And it is the task of the Church to bring that knowledge of Jesus to the world.

Christ is the head; the Church is the body. The head must have a body through which it can work. The Church is quite literally hands to do Christ's work, feet to carry his gospel and a voice to speak his words. There is no Plan-B. If the Church fails in this calling, Jesus has no contingency plan.

Now we can return to the earlier verses of tonight's passage and look a little more closely at some of the characteristics of a true Church.

*[15] For this reason, ever since I heard about your **faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love** for all the saints, [16] I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

Paul thanks God for their faith in Christ and their love to all God's consecrated people. The two things which must characterize any true Church are

- loyalty to Christ and
- love to men.

Easy words but difficult practice! The two should come together but so often don't. The Pharisees had a loyalty to God, but it made them contemptuous of other men. The Spanish Inquisition had an apparent loyalty to Christ - but it led them to persecute and execute anyone who thought differently from them. Sometimes we can be so harsh in the way that we defend what we believe to be the true Christian doctrines, that any love is negated and killed. There can be an apparent loyalty to the doctrines of the Church which come across as so harsh, that the loving call of our Saviour is drowned out. When we've condemned and criticised everyone and everything as being contrary to God's Law who is there left to hear the sweet words of Jesus saying "Come to me all you who are troubled, and I will give you rest."?

When Jesus was asked what was the greatest of all commandments, he refused to name just one, but linked two together: Matthew 22:37-40:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
[38] *This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* [40] *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

It's a bit like the old argument about the role of Faith and Works in salvation. In reality, you cannot separate the two. To use an illustration from my old mate CS Lewis, if you ask me which is the more important: showing loyalty to Christ or showing love to fellow men, I'll answer that if you can tell me which blade of a pair of scissors does the most cutting! The two work together, or not at all.

Another characteristic of the Church is that it should always be growing closer to God - not that it should ever feel that it has reached a full understanding or that it has got as close to God as is possible. In verse 17 Paul says this:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Wisdom and revelation - again two things that go together as an inseparable pair.

Wisdom is not "cleverness" in the popular sense (although that does come into it) but knowledge. Knowledge of the deep things of God. As the proverb puts it: Proverbs 9:10 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

And **revelation** here simply means "teaching" or sharing that knowledge, that wisdom.

So this dual call to the Church to receive wisdom and reveal that wisdom to others should guard against the old Gnostic heresy. There's no point hiding away in a monastery acquiring heaps of knowledge and wisdom about God if that knowledge isn't being shared and taught to others. Taken overall then, the Church should be evangelical: learning about the Lord and sharing that knowledge with others. Again, if you were to ask which is the more important between wisdom and teaching: I'll tell you the answer to that if you can tell me which is the most important part of breathing: breathing IN or breathing OUT! The two work together or not at all.

A third characteristic of the Church, and for which Paul prays for the readers of his letter, is **hope**. Verse 18:

*I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the **hope** to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*

Hope in a hopeless world?

All around us, there is increasing war, crime, homelessness, immorality, natural disaster, poverty, famine, disease, exploitation and - in short - evil. Truth has given way to spin and honesty has given way to political correctness. What is there to hope for? What, if anything, can rescue this world from an inevitable slide down into disorder and ruin? Can it be saved by the United Nations, by NATO, by the European Union? Can it be saved by a Common Agricultural Policy, can it be saved if we all cut our use of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions? Can it be saved by disarming the Muslim Fundamentalists?

On the face of it, the world is heading towards ruin. But the Christian hope and belief is the opposite. Christians believe that, as time goes on, we shall see the revelation of the power of Jesus at the second coming, when the world will be finally purified from all the things that bring pain and distress. It will be the time when the salvation that we have found personally through Christ will be manifest, and work through the whole of creation to bring about the restoration of his originally perfect world. And it is that hope that Paul is reminding his readers of.

And what leads us to hold out that hope? What proof do we have that these hopes are justified? Well this is where, in my opinion, the passage reaches its thrilling climax. Our proof lies in what we have already seen of God's power. Verses 19 & 20:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, [20] which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Paul is saying that the proof of God's power to rescue and restore this world has already been demonstrated in his raising of the Lord Jesus from the dead, and seating him at his right hand. Man had no power over the resurrection then, and man has no power over the resurrection now.

And not only does no man have power over the resurrection, but nothing and no-one else does either. Read from mid-way through verse 19:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, [20] which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, [21] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

That sentence is so reminiscent of a verse from later on in Ephesians: Ephes. 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

And what Paul is saying is that not only has Christ been given authority over all earthly powers, but over all the powers in the heavens too. He is *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

He is Lord of Lords, King of Kings, name above all names. There is not a being in heaven or on earth to whom Jesus is not superior. Jesus will have the last word on everything and everyone that exists, that has existed or that will exist.

Praise the Name of the Lord!