

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

#02-0867

NOVEMBER 25, 2008

HEAD OVER ALL, TO THE ECCLESIA

I have often repeated Paul's words that the ecclesia is the body of Christ, a living, breathing organism, not a great business organization patterned after the world. The ecclesia is something heavenly and from the heart of God. The body is made up of many members, and all the members are called to work together through the life of Christ that dwells in them. No one member is to be left out if we are to mature, both individually and as a spiritual body.

The New Testament clearly teaches us that all believers are responsible to exercise their gifts as spiritual members of the body of Christ. Much light is shed upon this matter through two words—*one another*. Throughout the New Testament, these two words, or a similar set of words—*each other*—are discovered in many places. Simply, these expressions are best summed up as all believers ministering in and to the body of Christ. We must not allow the concept of leadership to override the matter of one another. But having said this, we must also realize that true spiritual leadership is vital in the growth of the body of Christ. In some respects, spiritual leadership should be exercised by each member of the body of Christ, commensurate with his or her gifting.

Now, the word of God does not always give us a clear impression of how leadership is organized and how it operates in the ecclesia. Why? Because it is based on *life*, not on form! The Lord came to give us *life*, His life! He did not write us a manual of how to do everything because the government of the ecclesia rests on His shoulders. He wants us to rely on Him through the leading of the spirit of God. Because life is the issue, it appears that God causes different assemblies to be led in different ways. However, there are some basic principles that apply to all assemblies.

First, in the body of Christ, we must conclude that leadership is more than a few men holding the reins of ministry to the body. It is even far more difficult to conclude that the assembly is to be led by one man. For example, in the ecclesia in Jerusalem, there were apostles and elders leading. In the beginning of the ecclesia in Antioch, there were only prophets and teachers ministering to the Lord (Acts 13.1-2).

Spiritual leadership is never a matter of one person in the lead, no matter how gifted or talented he may be. Leadership is collective. **It is manifested in the many and not the few.**

Second, the concept of elders exclusively directing and ruling all the affairs of a local ecclesia, making all the decisions for the assembly, dealing with all of its problems, and supplying all of its teaching is not reflected in the many uses of *one another* in Scripture. In fact, the body of Christ is to be built up and edified by the entire assembly of *one another*.

This does not mean that leadership in the body of Christ is unimportant. It is very important, but it must be seen in the proper light of the *brethren* and *one another*. Elders (the person, not the title) are an important part of the local assembly, but only a part. As elders, they are the more mature brethren who help the other brethren in their spiritual growth. Elders should be models of pastoral care so that others can take up their responsibility. Elders should also nurture and help younger brethren in Christ, and they should facilitate the assembly in entering into its full ministry.

In the early Pentecostal ecclesia, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers, and elders were working to perfect the saints. Elders could have been apostles, prophets, teachers, or evangelists; but it did not follow that all prophets, teachers, and evangelists were elders. Peter was both an apostle and an elder. A point could be made as well that Peter was an evangelist on the day of Pentecost when 3000 were saved. This is life!

Third, it is true that some believers, because of particular gifting and spiritual maturity, may take the lead more than others. There is nothing wrong with this, and it is most likely needed at times. But the leadership and pastoral responsibility should never continually fall upon the shoulders of one person. There is great danger for the person as well as for the assembly. The person could end up being the center of the assembly rather than Christ who is to be all and in all in the assembly.

In the body of Christ, the brethren must be the ones who are responsible for the affairs of the assembly as each one is gifted to minister in doing the work of one another! Our Lord Jesus commanded us to love one another. Taking up our responsibility in the body is a sign that we love one another. Do we care enough for our brothers and sisters in Christ that we will lay down our lives and serve as we are led by the spirit of God? May it be so!

Fourth, what I believe to be one of the most important principles; the entire body of Christ is under one Head who is the Head over all rule and authority. No man or group of men can lay claim to being the head of the body of Christ or the head of a local ecclesia. Paul declared:

He is the head over all rule and authority.... (Colossians 2.10 NASB)

He is also head of the body, the ecclesia.... (Colossians 1.18 CV)

(God) gives Him, as Head over all, to the ecclesia which is His body, the complement of the One completing the all in all (Ephesians 1.22-23 CV).

Christ Jesus our Lord is Head over all, and He has been given to the ecclesia as the Head of His body. All direction and life must come from our Head. There is no other source of life, and there is no other source from which all rule and authority emanate. If anyone tries to circumvent or take the place of the Head over others, then that one is no longer operating in the realm of spiritual leadership, and all sorts of problems and challenges, even divisions, will enter the life of a local assembly. Again, consider what Paul had to say on the matter.

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4.14-16 NASB)

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. (Colossians 2.18-19 NASB)

We are to grow up in all aspects into Him, which means we are to be conformed to Christ who is the Head. If we do not hold fast to the Head, then our spiritual growth as the body is stunted. If we are to grow, not in numbers but in spiritual life, then we must hold fast our Head so that the entire body operates in such a way, directed by the Head, so as to grow and build itself up in love; a growth which comes from God who is love. Spiritual leadership is holding fast to the Head **in love!**