

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)

#03-0916

The Building Up In Love

March 2, 2009

As stated in several issues, Scripture says many things about the kingdom, but one thing it does not explicitly command the ecclesia of God to do is to build or advance the kingdom. The reason is very simple: The kingdom is the realm of the will of God. In other words, in God's realm, which is spiritual and celestial, His will is done, and His kingdom is manifested wherever His will is done. Today, the nations are not doing the will of God, but when the kingdom of the heavens comes to this earth, the will of God will progressively be done until the whole earth is filled with His glory and all things are subjected unto His Son, the heir of the nations. The fact of the matter is that the kingdom of the heavens coming to the earth is the fulfillment of the prayer Jesus taught His disciples: **Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth** (Matthew 6:10 ASV). The coming of the kingdom means that the will of God is coming. We could reword this to state: **Thy will come. Thy will be done.** Thus, entering the kingdom is entering the will of God, and those who will enter it in the oncoming eon are the ones who did the will of the Father, for **"Not every one saying to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the kingdom of the heavens, but the one doing the will of My Father, the [One] in [the] heavens"** (Matthew 7:21 ALT).

Now, although Scripture does not speak of building the kingdom, it does speak of the body of Christ building up itself in love. It should not surprise us that Paul, the apostle of the nations, is the one who encourages the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ, to be built up, to grow, and to be fitted together.

We see this most clearly in the Ephesians epistle.

(11) And he gave some to be apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; (12) for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: (13) till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (14) that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; (15) but speaking truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him, who is the head, even Christ; (16) from whom all the body fitly framed and knit together through that which every joint supplieth, according to the working in due measure of each several part, maketh the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16 ASV)

Some Christian groups place most of their emphasis on verse 11 and what they call the five-fold ministry, which has led to these gifts being exalted as titles and positions, which in turn has led to the exaltation of men. However, Paul's emphasis is on the building up of the body of Christ. Some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor-teachers are given to the ecclesia for the purpose of building up the corporate body, not building up the gifts given. It is quite obvious that Paul's emphasis is on the whole body of Christ reaching a particular goal, and that goal is to be perfected by growing up in all things into Christ and fully maturing in Christ. Knowing the Son of God is one component of this building process, but it is more than this; it is to be like Christ in every aspect and respect. And, to achieve this goal, the saints must be perfected to do the work of ministering to one another so that the body will be fitly framed together like the joints of a human body, each part doing its part in order for the body to mature. There is only one way for this building to take place, and that is through love. The body is to love itself, and in this love, all parts of the body are to work together so that the whole body grows up to be intimately connected to its Head. Thus, love is the way of building.

However, there is a danger or an obstacle to this building process, and that is every wind of doctrine. In other words, certain teachings are emphasized to the exclusion of other teachings, leading to imbalances and, most of all, the ecclesia not being built up in love. This danger is most acute with the emphasis-driven ministries, and kingdom-building emphasis could fall within this category.

As one reads Paul's epistles, it becomes apparent that his heart was always on building up the ecclesia and not tearing it down. The Lord had given him and the other apostles authority for building the saints up, not tearing them down (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10), but this did not mean that they were not to exhort, warn, and even discipline them. The key to their building up the saints was to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
(Romans 14:19 NASB)

This was and is the heart of the building up in love, and it starts at the level of the individual. Each joint must love the other joints, for we are individually members one of another (Romans 12:5). So, Paul encourages us: **Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law** (Romans 13:8 NASB).

Now, in his Ephesians epistle, Paul gives further clarity to this building project. I refer to the following verses quite often because I believe they are important to our understanding of how God intends to fulfill His purpose and of the true meaning of New Jerusalem, which I am writing about in a series titled *New Jerusalem*.

(19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, (20) having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, (21) in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, (22) in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22 NASB)

The body building itself up in love is described as a holy temple in the Lord, a dwelling of God in spirit. The footnote in my NASB allows for *in the Spirit* to be translated as *in spirit*, which seems to me to be the more appropriate way to view it. Thus, the whole building is a spiritual temple in the Lord; it is where the spirit of God dwells among the spirit of the saints. It is set apart unto God, and it is in the Lord, the Son of God, with Him as the corner stone that holds it all together. Of course, there is much more to be gleaned from these verses, but the point is that God intends for the whole spiritual building to be fitted together. We are being built together for a glorious purpose.

It is important that we understand that this building project proceeds on a spiritual level within individual believers and among the corporate body of believers (ecclesia), and this building is designed to prepare them to be counted worthy to enter into the coming kingdom of our Lord when it is manifested on earth in the next eon (age). Paul called it inheriting the kingdom (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:5). However, as this building process occurs in our present eon within and among believers, it is to be manifested in their love for one another and for the world in a way that others see. After all, love is not some ethereal concept; it is an action that has noticeable results.

In other words, the building that is to take place today is preparation to enter the coming kingdom in order to reign with Christ. This building work is personal and spiritual with practical outworking. It starts with the individual believer but is worked out in relation to other believers in the body of Christ. In doing so, we are to try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:10). Is this not learning the will of God? I submit that it is, and that as we learn to discern and then obey the will of God, we touch the kingdom of God. But what is the will of God? It is to love, for **God is love**. Thus, the only building that matters in our present day is the body of Christ building up itself in love.