

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)

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ASSEMBLING TOGETHER [PART 3 — *BUILDING ITSELF UP IN LOVE*]

Not forsaking our own assembling together [*episunagoge*], as is the habit of some....
(Hebrews 10.25 NASB)

This series is about the assembling together of the Lord's people. The first two parts of the series have not dealt with the matter directly other than to state that assembling together has to do with life and love. Part two ended with Paul's word that the body of Christ is to build itself up in love, and this is where we need to begin. However, before doing so, there is one point that needs to be stressed. There are two aspects of the body of Christ being gathered or assembled together. The first is a spiritual matter. The body of Christ is joined to its Head *in* spirit. All who believe have been given an earnest of the spirit and have been placed *in* Christ and Christ *in* them. Those of us who believe and trust in Jesus are a temple of the spirit.

**Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
... Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom
you have from God, and that you are not your own?** (1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19 NASB)

We must be temples of the Holy Spirit in order for a much greater work to be accomplished and that is to be built together into a dwelling place for God *in* spirit. I refer to the following verses often, for I believe this truth has been lost in our day in which the emphasis of so many is on the temporal and the outward or physical aspects of assembling together.

**Consequently, then, no longer are you guests and sojourners, but are fellow-citizens of
the saints and belong to God's family, being built on the foundation of the apostles and
prophets, the capstone of the corner being Christ Jesus Himself, in Whom the entire
building, being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord: in Whom
you, also, are being built together for God's dwelling place, in spirit.** (Ephesians 2.19-22
CV)

The building work of the spirit of God is not manifested in outward appearance but *in* spirit. Notice that the body is described as God's family with Christ as the capstone, which means His life holds it together. Paul describes it as a building, a holy temple in the Lord that is being built together for God's dwelling place, *in* spirit. This is not a physical structure that we can see and touch here on earth. It can only be seen *in* spirit. It is a spiritual habitation in which God takes up residence. It is the new Jerusalem that is above and that one day will be completed, having the glory of God. This is the building work of God in our day. It is not of the earth; it is of heaven. It is not physical; it is spiritual. It is not made of bricks and mortar; it is made of spiritual people in the image of the Son of God. So, when we think of assembling together, we need to start with that which is spiritual and that speaks of the purpose of God, even the purpose of the eons.

Now, the second aspect of the body of Christ being gathered or assembled together deals with the building work that is to be done while the body of Christ is on earth. It too is a spiritual work, and, yet, it can only take place as the members of the body are joined together in living and loving ways. Many people look at the assembling together of the brethren as a call to go to meetings to do certain things,

such as to worship, to praise, to sing, and to pray. However, these activities only have value to the extent that they lead to the building up of the body in love. I can hear some people saying: "Wait a minute; do you mean to tell us that worship is part of the building up of the body in love? I thought worship is only for God." Yes; I do mean that true worship, that is, worship that is in spirit and truth (John 4.23, 24), builds up the body in love. If the Lord's people come together to worship, to break bread together, or for any activity because they love one another and love the Lord, do you not think that love will build up the body, which is growing to be a dwelling place of God, *in spirit*?

The greatest worship that God can receive is when His people are growing in love. Why? Because it is leading toward the ultimate intention of the God who is love! The Father is after a family that is filled with His love, that overflows with His love, and that expresses His love throughout His creation. Is this not the purpose and plan of the eons? Is this not the very heart of our Lord Jesus? I should say it is! I believe that everything the body of Christ does is to be for one purpose, and that is to build itself up in love. Paul tells us so.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, ... 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 4.11-16 NASB)

Why are there apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers? Is it so that some might have jobs to put food on their tables? Is it so that men can have titles just like those in organizations of the world? Is it so that the church can exalt men for their gift to the church? No on every count! There is only one reason for men to be gifted, not titled, with these responsibilities. I must confess that I have a big problem with the many titles that have been taken up by men who lead the church of our day. It is not about titles; it is about gifting and exercising the gift to the glory of God and not to the exaltation of man. The Lord gave some, not many, to equip the saints for the work of service. But what is this work? It is for the building up of the body of Christ. What is the purpose of the building? It is so that the body matures into the fullness of Christ, that is, that the body becomes like Christ, its Head. How is this to be done? It is done by speaking the truth in love. This is how the equipping takes place. It is not about coercing people into one mindset or about telling people what they want to hear, tickling their ears with fables and myths. It is about speaking the truth of the word of God, not for personal gain but for the gain of Christ and His body. Equipping the saints is to teach them and encourage them how to be connected to their Head and, in so doing, to be connected to one another in very practical and living ways. Equipping is not to indoctrinate the saints to think like an institution, or to hold to a set of doctrines, or to train them in the way of an organization, that is, how things work. No! It is to teach them and encourage them how to love. It is about encouraging them to be fitted and held together as each supplies.

Even mentioning some of these things, such as teaching from the word, I fear that the essential nature of this building work will be missed, and this essential nature is discovered in the phrase ***building itself up in love***. The body itself does the building, not the apostles, not the prophets, not the evangelists, and not the pastor-teachers. Those who have been gifted in this way, please hear this. It is not your job. Your job is to equip, not to build. It is to encourage, not to destroy. **Only God can cause the growth** (1 Corinthians 3.7), and He has made every provision for this growth to take place **because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us** (Romans 5.5 NASB).