

Bible Basics Conference 2011: “Christ the Lord, Christ the Head, Christ the King”

Part 8

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[00:00:01] When it comes to the truth of Scripture, there's much that is practical, but before we can take up in a practical way the applications of truth, we must first learn it, we might say intellectually, we must have it in our minds and our hearts and then we're able to put it into practice. And we've had much before us already in regard to truth for our minds and our hearts. And this session, it poses the question practically how does the head direct the body? And inevitably, in order to answer that question in half an hour this afternoon, we will be occupied primarily with the truth. And it's for us later on to go away and to put it into practice. I trust that when we see what it entails, we will [00:01:05] understand that we are already, we have been putting these things into practice. Firstly, we really ought to read some verses together. My intention is not to go through them verse by verse in great detail, but we really ought to read these verses together. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and commencing at verse 12. For as the body is one and has many members and all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free and have been all made to drink into one spirit. For the body is not one member but many. If the foot shall say because I am not the hand, I am not of the [00:02:03] body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body as it hath pleased him.

And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour, and our uncomely parts [00:03:04] have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need, but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked. That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye

are body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing, do all speak with tongues, do all interpret, but covet [00:04:03] earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way.

First I want to emphasise one verse which we read together, and I'm very thankful for what our earlier speakers have brought out, and it's this verse, for by one spirit we have all been baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bondmen or free, and have all been given to drink of one spirit. That's verse 13 of the passage we read together. Our brother Simon has already emphasised this, that this being baptised into one body is something that has taken place. It's not something which is an ongoing process in the [00:05:04] sense that God once and once for all established the assembly, and he did that, we can read a bit in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit came upon the believers and one body was formed. The church, the assembly, was inaugurated then, and subsequently every believer that trusts in Christ has been added to that one body. It's not something that you've done, it's not something that I have done, it's a work of God. And that's very important, it's a vital matter to grasp hold of at the very beginning, that the oneness of the body and our part of it is a work of Christ. And having accepted that, we have then some practical responsibility to follow on. So this doesn't take place, for instance, when we become a [00:06:05] member of a church or a denomination, it's not something that we sign up for, it doesn't take place when we're baptised, it's something that God has done. We have been baptised into one body, and that's important that we grasp that. This is where we have this intellectual truth, we must grasp this first before we can work it out in a practical way. Now, this is a very well-known image. I believe it was first seen about September 1914, I wasn't around at the time, but I understand that in what we now refer to as the First World War, then it was known as the Great War. They thought that it was such an extensive war as the war to end all wars. Sadly, we know that wasn't the case. Here is Lord Kitchener, and this was a recruitment poster, and at the top of it, it said, Britons, your country [00:07:08] needs you. And it was a very successful recruitment campaign, because what it did, when young men saw this poster, they weren't able to think of the next person, it was their responsibility to enlist. They could see that Lord Kitchener was pointing to them, and them alone. Well, if we can denationalise it a little, and remove your country needs you, the question has been posed in this session, how does the head practically direct the body? And the simple answer, and I want you to remember this, when you see this image, I want you to remember the answer to that question is it's you, you and me. How does the head direct the body? The answer is you. That's how. Now, let's just be clear. In the grand scheme [00:08:08] of things, ultimately, God doesn't need you or me. He could establish all things by himself. The Lord Jesus could act on his own. He doesn't need to use you and me. But in grace, in the counsel of God, he has established certain things, certain arrangements, certain order of things, that he is pleased to use us. And in so far that he has purpose to use us, in so far as we take that caveat, it's right to say, I believe, it's not speaking irreverently to say the Lord Jesus needs you in order to accomplish his will. I'm talking about in a practical responsibility. God is sovereign. He could accomplish things without us. But [00:09:06] in wonderful grace, he's brought us into fellowship with himself, and he's established a certain order of things that he might use us. And so, in a practical way, the answer to this question is, how does the head direct the body? The answer is you. He needs you to fulfil the responsibilities which he has given you. He needs you, he needs me, to respond and to fulfil that sphere of service which he has set before us. Now, if you take any company, any firm, any organisation in this world, indeed, regrettably and sadly, we can say, if you take most denominations, most churches, so called, and you draw a diagram of the order, [00:10:02] the hierarchy, you'll come up with something like this. At the top, you have the chief executive officer, the CEO. Under him, under the head, the chief, you'll

have various managers. They may be called different names. And under them, sub-managers. And under them, maybe some more managers, or heads of department. And ultimately, there'd be lots of layers, and ultimately, there'd be the workers. And this is certainly true of most, if not all, organisations in this world. Now, this is not a scriptural order. This is not a diagram of how God has been pleased to arrange the church, or his body, practically, on earth. Very sadly, if we look at many churches, we'd find, instead of a CEO, we may have a Pope, [00:11:08] or an Archbishop, and under him, a Bishop, and under him, well, the titles will change, but there's layers and layers in this hierarchy. Each one reporting above, and he reports to someone above, and so on, and ultimately, there's one at the top. Well, we don't want to be occupied with the way this world is organised. This diagram better illustrates the arrangement in regard to the Lord Jesus Christ as head. Now, it's not perfect. We're going to see that in the next slide. But this is a better, more true representation. You know, each one of us, through the grace of God, is directly and individually linked to the Lord. Each of us, we've had this brought before us already, we can say, each one, he [00:12:03] is my saviour, he is my Lord. We don't have to go through any other. We're not on some lower level. We can say, Christ the head, and each member of his body, we have a direct and personal link with our Lord and saviour, in regard to headship. That's a wonderful working out of grace. You won't find this arrangement in the systems of men. You won't find this arrangement in the companies and the firms of this world. What grace is shown in the way in which the Lord deals and directs the members of his body. A better representation would be this. That there's a circle which represents the church, the assembly, or in the aspect we're looking now, the body. Now, I would suggest that one way of thinking of [00:13:05] this is that the church universally comprises every believer who's ever lived, from Pentecost to the rapture. And certainly we can view the church, the assembly, in that way. But the way we want to look at it today is in its body sense. And the body comprises every true believer alive on earth at any one moment. And that's a slightly different definition, but it's the way in which we must look at the church because of the verses we've had before us. And those that are asleep in Jesus are not practically part of the body. They're still part of the church, the assembly, of course. But they're not practically of the body in the way in which we're viewing it today. But the body, in a diagram, would be [00:14:01] best represented by this circle. And we can say every body, there's one body comprised of every true believer. Every true believer is a member of this one body. And the centre of this body is Christ. Christ, the centre. Now the thing about a circle, of course, is you can't actually see the centre. It's just a point. And we must be very careful now. I'm not suggesting in any way that Christ is insignificant. Of course, he is the most important aspect of the body. But in regard to what the world sees, the world doesn't see the one it's rejected. The world doesn't see Christ. It doesn't see him as Lord, let alone as head. But what it does see is Christ's body. It sees every member of the body. It sees you and me. And that's all it can see. And that's why it's a very testing matter [00:15:05] for us as to exactly what does the world see when it observes the body aspect of the church. Well, we can be thankful that when we come to Scripture, in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, we don't get a picture of any of these diagrams. Paul didn't use this as an illustration of the body. Nor did he use this as an illustration of the body. Nor this. But he used the illustration of a body. Here it is, a head, a labelled body, eye, head, mouth, ear, wrist, elbow and so on. We're familiar with our own bodies. What a wonderful illustration. You know, we need to get things the right way round. When God made man, he didn't some years later think, [00:16:01] well actually a man, a body, that's a good example, a good illustration of the truth of the body. I'll use that. I'm quite certain that actually in making man, God made man in such a way that it was a reflection of that which was in God's heart in regard to the church, the assembly and its body aspect. God had in mind what the body was and he created man to be a reflection of this wonderful truth. So we can look at the body and we can understand something of the mind of God in bringing about the body of Christ. Well, the body of Christ we've read in our passage that God has given gifts to his body and we read a list of gifts and they're not, it's not

a complete list. If we want to understand the gifts of God, [00:17:02] there are three passages and we've looked at one of them already. The passage in Ephesians gives some of the gifts and we have another passage in Romans. And just by the way, those three passages represent the giver in a different aspect. In Ephesians, the giver of the gifts is the risen Christ. In Romans, the giver of the gifts is God. You might say God the father. But here in Corinthians, they're spiritual gifts. They're the gift of the spirit. So now when we think of gifts, we all like to get gifts. We may have some thoughts in our mind, some lovely well-wrapped parcels and we all like to receive gifts. When we get them, we wonder what's inside. Well, the children will be very happy to find something like this, I'm sure. But you know, the thing is, the gifts that God has given us, the gift [00:18:06] that Christ has given us, they're not toys. They're not to be played with. They're not for our entertainment or our amusement. And regrettably, at the end of the passage, the apostle, he lists some of these gifts and he says, first, God has set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, and after that, miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. And it seems that in Corinth, the saints there, they were glad to have these gifts, but they didn't understand what the purpose of them was for. They treated them like toys. They were showing off, I've got [00:19:03] a better bicycle than you, my gift's better than yours. This was the sorry state of Corinth and we need to avoid using the gifts of God in this way. Now, you may say, well, of course, we're mature, we're grown men and women, we don't use gifts like this. We've outgrown childish things. Well, I wonder, there are toys for grownups as well, aren't there? Maybe some of these are things that you have, you enjoy. Just an illustration of the fact that in this world, toys are not only the domain of children. We adults, we grownups, we can have things that we can play with, instead of using them in the way in which they were intended. But, you know, really, a better picture, a better illustration of the gifts [00:20:05] of God, the gifts of Christ, wouldn't be those things, the skateboards, the toys in the trains, or even the grownup toys, the phones, the computers, the cars, the clothes. Here we have illustrations of building materials and tools. And that is a better way, really, of looking at the gifts that God has given the church, his body. Because the purpose of spiritual gifts, the purpose of the gifts of a risen Christ, the purpose of the gifts from God are that there might be a building up of the assembly. Building up of believers individually, that believers might be encouraged, comforted, instructed, guided, and as a result that the house of God, that living structure, the church of God might be built up. And so each of us [00:21:08] have a gift. And I was very thankful that a brother has already made it clear that each of us has a gift. You don't think you've got a gift? You have. You have a spiritual gift. And God has given you that gift. He's given you to the assembly in order that he might use you for his own glory and for the blessing of others. Now, it's a question for you to discover what that gift is and to use it. But a few practical suggestions. One is none of us wakes up one morning with a light bulb moment to think, I know I have a gift for this or for that. I don't think that's how God operates. It's already been suggested [00:22:02] that we have natural abilities. God doesn't give us natural abilities without purpose. He doesn't give us natural abilities by accident that we might perhaps later on discover that they're useful. When he made us, he made us in a certain way with certain capabilities and talents that we might use them for his glory. And so firstly, we must recognize that what God has given us naturally should be at his disposal in spiritual things. But spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents. I want to be clear about that. But certainly God uses what he has given us naturally for his own purpose and will. But he has given us, each one, a spiritual gift or gifts. And he has given us gifts that are not natural and I believe that he nurtures that gift. We use our gifts in a sphere of service and [00:23:11] we discover over time that actually we have a capability in this sphere and God gives us encouragement and guidance. He will give others the discernment that we have this gift and opportunities will be presented to us to work in that sphere. It's not an overnight experience. It's something that we must be occupied with. So on a practical note, I would say you do serve where you can. You see a need and it's something that you can answer, you go and fill that need. It will be

apparent in due course whether you have a particular aptitude in that way, a particular aptitude in that line of things.

[00:24:03] Some of us are often on the platform. For some of us, our voices are heard. Our names might be noticed at the bottom of articles. And for others, it may seem that that's the only opportunity, the only sphere for service. Believe you me, those of us that are in the public eye are perhaps the least important in regard to spiritual gifts. Sisters, you may feel there's less scope for you in regard to the exercise of gifts than the brothers. It's not so. Many years ago, over about 20 years ago, I was speaking to an older brother in New Zealand and he asked me after the little gathering in Tunbridge Wells. At the time I was the youngest in fellowship and now I'm the oldest. But I explained, well, there's [00:25:06] just two brothers, myself and an older brother, and the rest are elderly sisters, 70-something sisters and 80s, and a dozen or so sisters and two brothers. And this brother, he said to me, if you're in a meeting with godly sisters, you'll be fine. And I thought that was a very wonderfully encouraging comment to make. Because outwardly, there's everything to discourage. As a young person, we seem to be preoccupied with youth and numbers. But this brother, he had his eye on the truth. And in practice, I can say he's absolutely right. The spiritual quality of a local gathering is as a result of the spiritual state of the sisters. And [00:26:04] in a practical way, it's the gifts and the service of the sisters primarily that has the most influence. It may seem like I'm emphasising to an extreme a certain aspect, but I think very often what is often before us is what is prominent. And we need just to redress the balance a little. And so, the answer to the question, how does the head practically direct the body? Well, he's given gifts. Each of us is linked personally to the head, the Lord Jesus. We can call him Lord and Saviour. And I'm very thankful for what has been brought before us already. Because if we grasp firstly the truth of our individual Lordship, then [00:27:03] the headship aspect will follow. Unless we acknowledge practically the Lord as Lord, then there can be no practical outworking of the headship aspect. So all that has gone before is vital. But then we must realise that the body is all that the world can see. The head is in heaven and he has on earth a body. If we go back to this illustration which is a scriptural illustration, we have here the head. Now the head, as our brother Simon has brought out, the head has the brain, the mind, the eyes, the ears, the mouth. And Christ, nothing escapes Christ. He sees all and he takes account of all. But what is left here on earth is his body. And each of you is vital. I want to stress that. Each of you [00:28:06] is vital. God has chosen you, he's given himself for you, you've been baptised into one body, you've been sealed by the spirit, he's given you a spiritual gift. And your sphere of service, where he has set you, is vital. How does God direct the body on earth? He uses you. And so it's a wonderful matter of grace. But I want to encourage us each one, especially the sisters, but I don't want to overlook the brothers, the younger brothers. There's so much. You know in the list of gifts, there are some are foundational. Apostles, prophets and so on. They're the foundations of the building. We don't see those anymore, but what we do see is the superstructure. And you know one of the descriptions of gifts is helps. Helps. A very wide application. Maybe you think, maybe you recognise that [00:29:07] all you can do is help. Don't think of it like that. Don't say, well all I can do is help. You know sometimes we say, well we can't really help in this situation, but the least we can do is pray. No, the best thing you can do is pray. And if your gift is the gift of help, you don't think of it that, well at least I can help. The best thing you can do is to help. Why? Because Christ has made you a helper. And if you have a more prominent gift, well that's already something that's on display. So let's be encouraged, dear Christian friends, dear brethren, what grace Christ has given you a gift. He's brought us into one body because he needs you. That's how he's established things. He needs you and [00:30:01] he directs the body by our individual attachment to him. We recognise him as Lord and together, when we come together, we're able to put that into practice and the head is acknowledged and the head operates down here. The world can see what Christ is in his absence. The world sees Christ through his own.