

One way of looking at our Christian teachings is to divide them into three categories:

Those on which the Bible is very clear

Those on which it is not so clear

And those on which it is distinctly vague.

Our flexibility and room for manoeuvre can be decided in this way.

Unfortunately, historically, and even today, there is not always agreement over which teaching and practice goes where.

I am going to look at a teaching that is not always accepted as fundamental but is clearly and repeatedly proclaimed by the Bible, the New Testament, and especially the letters of Paul.

It goes under many names; the gifts of the Spirit, Body Ministry, the Church as the Body of Christ, for example.

Its core teaching is as follows:

Christ on earth is represented by the local church, which is his body. (Christ is not represented by one man, or woman, as his vicarious presence).

This body is made up of all believers.

Each believer has a unique role to play in the functioning of this body.

Many conflicts, confusions and contradictions in Christian leadership, ministry, and personal lives would be resolved and removed if this teaching was universally accepted, taught and understood.

Let's quickly look at it.

In three of Paul's letters, written for three very different reasons and at three different times he lays out this teaching in some detail.

1 Corinthians 12, -a whole chapter (and he follows his teaching with the wonderful Ch. 13, on love)

Romans 12 -a whole chapter

Ephesians 4, -similar to Rom 12, first half of the chapter on the description and the second half on the application.

Now, much as I would love to spend the rest of this year expounding and explaining these three chapters this morning we are here to bring John and Gill's ministry to attention and to recognise them in our church in the position into which we believe God has placed them.

So I will read some verses from each of these core passages and I think that the clarity of Paul's statements will speak for itself.

1 Cor 12:12

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Rom 12:4-6

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,

5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:

Eph 4:15-16

speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Allow me to take a little visual explanation from 1 Corinthians:

1 Cor 12:14-26

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

19 If all were a single member, where would the body be?

20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,

24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

I think this is clear enough! And I do not need to expand any more explanation.

This picture of the Body is linked to the giving of gifts from the Holy Spirit. These gifts are our place in the body.

Some have differentiated between the lists of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, the practical gifts in Romans and the authoritative gifts in Ephesians.

This is helpful in that it helps us understand the huge variety of gifts, but I prefer not to make such clarifications: to me God calls the whole person, with natural gifts, intellectual gifts, spiritual insight gifts and all sorts of gifts.

And he calls us to a place in the body.

Spiritual growth and maturity is not about getting bigger, but about knowing your place in the body and being it: if an arm, be an arm, if a liver, be a liver,

Bodies have heads.

We will avoid jokes about headless chickens etc but if the body and head are not in harmony we have a problem.

This morning *we are not* recognising John and Gill as being more important than anybody else.

We are not elevating them to any higher position.

We *are* recognising them as becoming the head of this church, as we are the other parts of the body: all essential, all with different roles; each loved and respected.

Each role in the church carries each unique responsibility and its unique position. The hand is no less than the foot but don't try and walk on your hands too long and don't try and eat dinner with your foot.

So, having established this, my next point is to ask us how we should treat and support those to whom God tasks with leadership responsibility in his body.

Here, again, we could profitably spend a lot of time but I am going to make two points only.

The first point, one verse.

Eph 4:11-12

**And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,
12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,**

The purpose of leadership is to equip the saints for service.

Leaders should not be doing the entire ministry: the body should be taking its share; the leaders are there to equip.

Leaders are not there to command, but to teach and equip.

Sure, that often means doing when others are not able, or, unfortunately and only occasionally, not prepared to, -the buck stops at the head.

The second point, two verses

1 Tim 5:17-18

17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages."

The “double honour” referred to here means both in respect and obedience, and in payment.

Paul the Apostle set the example in that when the church could not afford to support him he supported himself as a tent maker, but he had a right to be supported, with a “double honour”.

Heb 13:17

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

So, two points:

- 1) Leadership is not to be overbearing and dictatorial, it is to equip
- 2) Leaders should be honoured and respected.

This morning it is my very great joy and privilege to recognise the role and position into which God has placed John and Gill in this church and I do so unreservedly.

I can tell you now that they will make mistakes and will not be perfect. But then, so will we all.

Let us be an example to other Churches and to Christians in how we support, honour, and when necessary, obey, the leaders God has given us.