

**Introduction:**

Many of us are currently involved in following the action at the Olympic Games. But if you are interested in such things you will be aware that the British football league teams are already in pre-season preparation and the Football league season begins next Saturday followed a week later by the Premier league. One of the things that will interest the sports journalists, and fans, is how long will the new managers keep their jobs. The shortest tenure for a manager was in 2007 when Leroy Rosenior at Torquay lost his job within ten minutes when the club was taken over. A slightly longer reign was Dave Bassett at Crystal Palace who lasted four days in 1984.

Most managers stay longer but we do know how insecure it is a role and how quickly managers can be sacked when things aren't going well. It's interesting how in the world of football the performance and well-being of a club is seen as entirely the manager's responsibility. If things aren't going well the immediate response is to sack the manager and bring in somebody else to run things. I lost count last season of the number of managers who lost their jobs but if the team wasn't doing well the manager was always found accountable. In cricket, however it seems to be slightly different. If the team doesn't do well they change the individual members, keep the management -but bring in new batters, bowlers and fielders to solve the problem - though that doesn't necessarily work either.

It raised the question in my mind "Who is responsible for the well-being and performance of a church?" Is it the Rector? the church wardens? The PCC? God himself? or

the individual members? Our reading tells us that the responsibility is yours, and yours and yours and yours and mine. Christ is the source of our strength and growth but each member has their own vital part to play. *v 16 "we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."* It is the responsibility of the whole church membership to build up the church, and this happens..... when each individual member is playing their own special part.

Our passage tells us that there are three important people or groups of people involved in the growth and development of a church. Firstly there is Christ himself who has given spiritual gifts to his people and who gives us his example to follow and is the head of the church and the source of its whole life. Unless a Church is rooted and grounded in Christ it will not live and grow as it should.

Secondly there are the church leaders, those to whom have been given gifts as prophets, apostles, evangelist, pastors and teachers they have been gifted by Christ for the good of the whole church but and this is the startling part, not to run the church. The gifts have been given, Paul tells us: "to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ." The leaders are there to help the individual members do the work.

And thirdly there are the church members who are called to serve and whose job it is to build up the church - the aim being that each and every member should become

strong and mature and in Paul's words, "measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ".

Paul starts the chapter with a call to the Ephesians to live a life of love. He has in the previous three chapters been concentrating on Jesus Christ and all that he has done for us and won for us. Paul now goes on to talk about our response to the enormous generosity and love we have received from God. He moves from thinking about what God has done to what we, as Christians, must be and do.

The call to God's people is that they should live a life of love that is characterised by humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with each other in love and being united in Christ who called us and saves us. This is what we should be as Christians. The one overriding characteristic of this church should be love. God's love flowing through each member and showing itself in all we do and are: the love that puts other people's needs before our own and that is willing to serve each other cheerfully and willingly. In the words of Christ to his disciples *"I have set you an example, you are to do as I have done for you"*. This love is a gift of God and comes from our own personal living relationship with Christ. As each one of us grows more deeply into Christ and receives all that he has to offer us we will grow in love, for him and for each other and as we love and serve each other we will become united, drawn together, with Christ as our head.

Paul tells us that every good thing that we have is the gift of grace from Christ. He has given gifts to every single one of his people. Every Christian has received the Holy Spirit and has been gifted by him to play their part in the

life and growth of the church. Our gifts are different, some more noticeable than others, but every one of us has precious gifts to use and develop in Christ's service.

The more obvious gifts of apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring and teaching are given to those who have usually been looked to as leaders in the churches. Those gifts are present in this benefice. In my time here I have noticed those giftings in the people I am getting to know. We have our prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers but they are not called to do all the work in the church. Their role is to equip the members to serve God here. The word that Paul uses, that is translated equip, comes from the Greek "katartizein" which is the word used in surgery for setting a broken limb or for putting a joint back in its place. It is also used in politics for the bringing together of opposing factions and in the New Testament it is used for the mending of nets and disciplining an offender until he is ready to take his proper place in the fellowship again. The basic idea of the word is that of putting things into the condition that they should be in.

So our church leaders are called and gifted so that they can help to make this church what it should be ..... but the making of the church is down to the individual members. My role as a pastor and teacher is to help each individual member to grow in faith and love and to help you to recognise the gifts that God has given you so that you can then use those gifts in God's service. It is not to do all the loving and caring in the church. We as leaders in the church should be giving our energies to teaching,

praying, guiding and equipping each individual member so that each one can use their own gifts in God's service.

So the leaders are called to equip the members to serve Christ and the role of each individual member is to develop the gifts they have been given and to use them in God's service. Their aim is to build up the body of Christ. Through love and service our churches should grow and develop into the glorious body that Christ wants us to be. We are not called simply to live decent respectable lives but are called to be examples of perfect Christian man and womanhood. Each one of us is called to reflect Christ in this community and to share his love for others.

I have been trying for the past few years to lead a training course to help church members grow in confidence and faith so they can develop their roles within the life of the church. Each time I have tried to begin things such as knee replacements and pandemics have interrupted my plans. However I am going to try again to run some sort of discipleship course across the benefice in the near future to enable us all to grow in faith and to be equipped to play our part within the body of believers in the benefice. So watch this space