

P.S.

KNITTING, it is probably fair to say, is not the popular activity it once was. Far Eastern manufacturing has probably put paid to that. One can buy a classily finished Chinese-made garment considerably cheaper than one could buy yarn, knitting needles and a pattern.

Nevertheless, we all know what a woolly jumper is; many of us—even some males—may even recollect how to knit one. My Yorkshire background may contribute towards the fact that I was taught to knit, both at school and at home. I actually quite enjoyed it, although I never quite mastered the art of the purl. The concept of putting the needle into the stitch the other way was just too much for me!

Yet the intricacy of a piece of knitting—each stitch meticulously and rather magnificently intertwined with the next—teaches a lesson: that one piece of wool, pretty useless on its own, when looped, shaped and interwoven in a certain way with two pieces of stick, remarkably comes to be something of shape and value, a continuous piece of material, and ultimately a garment.

All this might provide a nice idealisation of ecclesial unity, the stitches representing the individuals who make up the garment which is the ecclesia. No stitch exists in its own right, and none is an end in itself. Each exists only by virtue of the fact that it is tied into the one that preceded it and the one that will follow, those stitches above and those below. No stitch can be removed or has an independent existence; that can only be attempted by cutting the wool, and then the whole garment, not to mention the stitch itself, will come undone.

I was struck when preparing an exhortation on Colossians 2 recently that there are two references to the members of the ecclesia being “knit together” in that passage. Of course Paul was not writing of woolly jumpers; I have taken that particular picture to develop a modern-day metaphor of what it might mean to be knit together. But let’s consider what Paul has to say:

“For I would . . . that their hearts might be comforted, being *knit together* in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding . . .” (vv. 1,2).

Knit one, purl one

Paul wants the believers to be knit together as one, to be comforted and to be sure that, in Christ, God has supplied them with everything that they need. There is no need for them to worry. There is no need for them to look elsewhere. In Christ and in his body (the ecclesia) there is everything that they need.

Ecclesial unity—being truly knit together in love—is a high and noble ideal, one for which we must constantly strive. We must work tirelessly towards it, for, no matter how united and loving our particular lightstand might appear to be, there is always room for improvement.

The closeness that being knit together implies is further developed in the following famous passage about the love of David and Jonathan:

“And it came to pass . . . that the soul of Jonathan was *knit* with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul . . . Then Jonathan and David made a covenant . . . Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle” (1 Sam. 18:1-4).

Here is the closeness for which brethren should strive, being worked out and illustrated in the lives of David and Jonathan—a love that transcended even the love of a man and a woman; a love which treats the other as one would treat oneself; a love based on covenant. Jonathan’s paraphernalia—his weaponry and his royal robes, which betokened his status as military man and son of the king—meant nothing to him if they were kept only for himself. All would be shared with David.

Paul, though, will have the last word. Towards the end of Colossians 2 he develops further his point about ecclesial unity and the purpose of it. Once more he states that Christ supplies all that we need, and that he must govern our every direction as our head. It is our responsibility to make sure that we are truly knit tightly together, and that we use the nourishment Christ supplies to grow up to maturity. Paul writes that we must “[hold] the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and *knit together*, increaseth with the increase of God” (v. 19).

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