



THE CALL TO DIVERSITY

Catalog No. 1328

Ephesians 4:7-12

John Hanneman

Third Message

August 25th, 2002

In our last study in Paul's letter to the Ephesians we asked the question, What is the Church? We saw that, first and foremost, the Church is a community called together by God to be his people, unified around the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We learned also that relationships are the most important thing about the Church: first, the relationship that believers have with God, and second, the relationships they have with one another. In order for Christians to be worthy of their calling they must relate with character, showing humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance toward one another. The worthy walk is not a call to perfection, because we will make mistakes. The worthy walk is a call to honesty and authenticity in the Christian community.

We also saw that a worthy walk is a call to unity. Certain truths centering on the Christ event and on the Trinity are critical to the Christian life. Believers already possess unity in Christ. We are not called to create unity, but to maintain it. We must not get sidetracked into forcing agreement on minor points of theology. Augustine's word serves us well: "In essentials unity, in doubtful questions liberty, in all things charity."

Today we will deal with the question, How does the Church function? What is it that makes the Church healthy and vibrant? Paul's word in Ephesians 4 declares that a worthy walk is not only a call to unity, but a call to diversity, too.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says,

**"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."**

(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) (Eph 4:7-10, NASB)

"But to each one of us grace was given." All Christians possess spiritual gifts, what Paul calls "graces" (Greek, *charis*). We get the term charismatic from this word which signifies the Spirit-filled life.

What is a spiritual gift? Some believers don't even know they have a gift. Some open their gifts and use them, while others let them lie dormant. I like Ray Stedman's definition: "This grace is a capacity for service which is given to every true Christian without excep-

tion, and which is something each did not possess before he became a Christian." In the New Testament, four different passages make mention of some twenty spiritual gifts: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, and Ephesians 4. The text says, "to each one of us grace was given." The "each one" is in contrast to the "all" of verse 6. The phrase, "He gave gifts to men," is a reference to the ascended Christ. These gifts are given out "according to the measure of Christ's gift." "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11).

The text says that the gifts are the spoils of war, the result of the victory that Christ won on the cross. Here Paul quotes from Psalm 68, where the psalmist calls upon God to rescue Israel. God rescued his people in the wilderness and revealed himself to them at Mt. Sinai. This psalm was associated with Pentecost, when the giving of the law was commemorated. Pentecost was the day when the Spirit was poured out on all mankind, in fulfillment of Sinai. Spirit replaces the law, which now is written in the heart by the Spirit.

The "captives" referred to in verse 8 could be the defeated enemy who were taken captive, or the captives who were set free by the cross. The place of ascension is the heavenly throne; the place to which Christ descended is earth. This is not a reference to purgatory or hell, as some suggest. The point is that gifts are the spoils of a cosmic battle, given to believers, in order that "He might fill all things."

So every believer in the body of Christ is uniquely gifted. In the same way that there are different cells in the body, so too, according to the apostle, God has uniquely placed every believer in the body: "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor 12:18-19).

Three children were born to my wife and me. Each child carries the family name, each was raised the same way. But each one is unique. They look different from each other. They have different likes and dislike. They have different talents and different abilities in school and in sports. My children are all members of the same family, but they are very different from one another.

The same is true of the community of believers, what Scripture calls the body of Christ. Believers are born of God into the same family. All have the same Father, each one carries the family name, but each member is unique in terms of his or her contribution to the family.

Sibling rivalry is a big problem in many families. When one family member gets attention and praise, others try to imitate their behavior. But the fact is each one is unique. It is this uniqueness that frees us from comparing and competing in the Church. No one will function exactly like us. What works for one will not work for another.

Every believer is significant because he or she makes a contribution to the whole body. Listen to how Paul puts it, in 1 Corinthians: "The body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?" (1 Cor 12:14-17).

No one can say, "There is no need for me." If you say you don't have a contribution to make, that is simply a form of pride or self-pity. It is a lie that you need to confront. You may feel insignificant but you are not. You are essential to the proper working of the body.

On the other hand, every believer needs other members of the body. No one is to be self-sufficient or self-contained. No one can say they have no need for others. This too is a lie that is rooted in pride and self-deception. The world says that we have to be multi-talented and multi-gifted, but the truth is that we are good at some things and not very good at others. We need to be honest enough to know ourselves, humble enough to ask for help, and courageous enough to make hard choices about what we should do and what we should not do. One thing that is contributing to the high level of stress and depression in this valley is the feeling that we have to do everything.

As we have noted, there are some twenty unique gifts mentioned in the N.T.—and this is probably not a comprehensive list. The gifts fall into three categories: support gifts, working gifts, and sign gifts. Ephesians 4:11-12 introduces the support gifts.

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. (Eph 4:11-12)

All of these gifts could be called speaking or equipping gifts. The word "equipping" was used of setting a broken bone or mending a fishing net. It has the notion of proper functioning or utilization.

Apostles were men who saw the Lord, while prophets laid down the Word of God. Even though some people today might be gifted similarly, the gifts of apostleship and prophecy were speaking gifts given in the first century.

Evangelists are believers who are gifted in bringing

people to Christ. They seem to always be in situations where they are asked to witness to their faith. Their passion is for the unbelieving world. While all Christians are to be evangelists, some are especially gifted in leading people to Christ.

The gift of pastor-teacher is a single gift. Every pastor must be a teacher, but not every teacher is a pastor. At first glance you might think that the pastor is charged to do three things, but the grammar here makes it clear that it is the pastor's function to equip the saints, and then the saints in turn do two things: they perform the work of the ministry and build up the body.

This is contrary to the way many churches operate. Some bodies hire a pastor to do all the work, while the congregation just observes. The pastor takes care of the church, mows the lawn, prints the bulletin, etc. But all this activity leaves him no time to study the Word of God. The biblical view of ministry is that every saint is gifted. All have a capacity to be involved in the ministry. It is the responsibility of the pastor to equip and the job of the saints to work and serve.

The pastor is a coach, not a player. He walks the sidelines, assisting and encouraging the players. He helps the saints find where they are best suited to play. He disciplines them so that they develop. He makes sure they are at the training table so that they are well fed.

The second category of gifts is working or service gifts. There are eleven of them. Because of time constraints, I will cover them briefly.

The gift of administration involves the ordering or guiding of the body. The word means to steer, pilot, or guide.

Discernment is the gift of being able to distinguish truth from error. A person with this gift can pinpoint the fine line between what is true and what is false.

Exhortation is the gift of coming alongside someone to lift his spirits. The very presence of a man or woman possessing this gift encourages people spiritually.

Faith is the gift that sees something that needs to be done, and although it looks impossible, goes ahead and does it. One who has this gift of faith takes the body of Christ into new territory.

Giving is not just a reference to contributing money, but making a spiritual impact that touches people's lives. When resources are given they have a spiritual impact on the recipient.

Helps is a wonderful gift. A man or woman possessing this gift helps share the load with people who need a helping hand, not just lifting a physical or emotional load but being a spiritual blessing as well.

Knowledge is the gift of being able to mine the deep things of Scripture in order to edify others.

Many gifts of leadership are necessary for any local church to function properly, whether they are operating in a formal leadership position or not. In our singles

group of fifty or sixty people we need five or six gifts of leadership for the group to really be a community. Because we have a diverse church body both ethnically and economically, we need gifts of leadership functioning in many different arenas.

Mercy is the capacity to show compassion to the hurting. People with this gift come alongside others who are struggling, perhaps hospitalized, and pour out their hearts toward them.

The gift of service is simply the ability to serve and bless people. This is the ministry of the deacons, who involve themselves in the lives of people in many different ways.

Wisdom is the gift of being able to put into effect the things we have learned and implement them in practical situations. It is important for elders to have this gift. They see through all the options, draw on Scripture, and suggest a conclusion. When the elders speak, everyone knows that the Spirit is working.

These gifts are absolutely critical to the proper working of a local body of believers. Here in PBCC some of these gifts tend to be diminished at times, as we seem to elevate the speaking and teaching gifts to the detriment of the serving gifts. This is one reason why the Yucatan ministry trip is so valuable every spring. It is largely a serving, not a speaking ministry.

The last group is sign or authenticating gifts, i.e., tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, and miracles. These gifts seem to be focused on unduly in our day. All spiritual gifts are not miraculous gifts, however. John the Baptist did no miracles, yet Jesus said that no man was greater than John.

Sign gifts are given to authenticate the word of the gospel. In all of biblical history there were only four periods in which miracles occurred: Moses, the Prophets (primarily Elijah and Elisha), Jesus, and the apostles. There were also four epochs of revelation: law, the prophets, the gospels (which record the life of Jesus), and the letters of the apostles. Miracles authenticated each new stage of revelation.

I believe that God is doing miraculous things today, but we are most likely to see evidence of sign gifts where the gospel is making new inroads and where the written Word requires authentication. We must remember that all the gifts are for the common good. They are not an end unto themselves. Where we have the revealed word of God we don't need more signs; we need to be obedient to what we already know.

These then are the spiritual gifts that Paul lists here in Ephesians and elsewhere in the New Testament.

As every believer is responsible to discover his or her spiritual gift and begin using it, let me make the following suggestions:

1. A spiritual gift is different from a natural talent.

Just because you are a schoolteacher doesn't mean

you have the spiritual gift of teaching. Just because you run a corporation doesn't mean that you have the spiritual gift of leadership. In fact, God may gift us in areas where we think we are weak.

2. It is likely that believers do not have a single gift, but a cluster of gifts.

We may have one primary gift, but we probably have parts of other gifts, therefore, our gifts will not match up perfectly with someone else's. We need to dare to be different.

3. To discover your gift, start with your desires.

God doesn't call you to do something that makes you miserable. Go ahead, experiment with the things you like doing. We discover our spiritual gifts in the same way that we find which sports we like, our major in school, or our career path. We do not know how we function or even what we like until we experiment. If we begin responding to needs, God will direct us.

4. Spiritual gifts need to be developed, exercised, and practiced.

Just because we have a particular gift doesn't mean there won't be effort involved. We need to develop and work on the areas in which we are called to serve.

5. We need to encourage one another in the development of our gifts.

Let us encourage each other by confirming what we see God doing in particular situations. We should tell people how we see God using them or how we are blessed spiritually by their service. Sometimes this means being honest with people about the ways in which we feel they are not gifted. This is good for the body of Christ.

6. Look for ways to discover and exercise your gifts at work.

We don't have to save our gift for church or church people. Our gift will function very well at work, which is an excellent environment in which to develop our gifts. When we unleash our gifts at work, then our work becomes ministry.

7. Do not become impatient, because gifts take time to discover.

When we come to Christ we don't get a manual telling us what our gifts are. Some gifts lie dormant until we discover what they are, so we should not become discouraged.

8. When you discover your gift, build your life around it.

We don't have to do everything. There will always be too many needs to meet and too many things we want to do. We have to decide between better and best. Don't build your gifts around your life; build your life around your gifts.

9. Using our gifts should be a source of joy and ful-

fillment, not a burden.

Using our gifts will take work, and there may be a cost, but we should not feel weighed down. If we are, then perhaps we are doing the wrong things. Nothing should excite us more than using our gifts.

10. Do not wait until someone asks; respond to a need immediately.

I want to give you permission to start responding to needs right now. This is the ministry of the saints. The task of pastors and elders is not deciding what people should do. When this happens, Christians end up doing things they are not gifted to do. The task of leadership is to encourage the body in what they want to do and support that. Oftentimes the best ministries in a church are the ones the saints themselves initiate, without direction from pastors and elders.

The most important thing about our church is not having multi-media presentations or a world-class speaker who will draw the crowds, nor is it having a full-time worship pastor. The most critical thing about this church is that we are a community in which gifts

are functioning on all levels. This is what will make PBCC a vibrant, healthy place. If spiritual gifts are functioning, then all these other things will be working too.

A church should not be built around the gifts of one or two people. The call to diversity is the call to participation. The body of Christ is like an orchestra: people play different instruments, but we all play the same song. And when all the instruments are playing in harmony, to the glory of God, that is the sweetest thing you will see or hear in church. The words that Jesus spoke in the temple, quoting from Isaiah, also apply to each individual believer:

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;
To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God.” (Isa 61:1-2)

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