

Why the Church Exists

by Ray C. Stedman

We have been considering the defense of the Christian in the midst of a highly confused and darkened world. Now it is important that we take up the equally valid matter of the place of the church, i.e., the corporate body of Christians, in the world and the specific character of its ministry and its power.

You will recognize instantly that this whole matter of the place of the church in the world today is a very confused issue. On one hand we are being told that the job of the church is to forget doctrinal preaching and desire for individual salvation and involve itself in the problems of human suffering and injustice. The church, they say, belongs in the vanguard of the struggle for social justice and the reason Christianity is shunned by the world is because Christians will not dirty their hands or risk their reputations. We are being told that Christians can only show their faith as Christians if they are willing to carry a placard in Alabama, risk jail in some picket line, join the fight for land reform, or the abolition of laws against homosexuality and adultery. We are told that the church should be speaking to all the issues of life today and should be concerned about problems of metropolitan government, mass transportation, suburban segregation, equal representation in legislatures, and other problems that confront our modern world.

On the other side there is an equally vocal group which says the job of the church is to thunder against evil from the pulpit, to denounce Communism, and anti-Americanism, and, thus preserve, if possible, the blessings of bourgeois materialism for Christians to enjoy to the full. They say we must attack with scorching language anyone who dares to raise questions about the Bible, or threaten the special privileges of Christians in modern society. The theme of this group seems to be, "Come weal or come woe, the status is quo."

Now this polarity of view as to what the church should be, and how it should work, is a perfect example of the ability of the devil to drive people to extremes and thus weaken the faith of many and cast a cloud of obscurity over the truth. In the midst of this kind of confusion the letter to the Ephesians calls us back to reality.

In this letter we have a declaration of the intention of God in forming the church, and a clarifying of its purpose and its ministry – not only in the 1st century but in the 20th as well. As always, when we come to the Scriptures we are returning to the fundamental issue of any matter, to basic, essential, underlying truth from which we can work our way out again to the application of these things in every area of life. It is so necessary that we get our direction from the revelation of God in Scripture. Let us turn now to the first three verses of Chapter 4:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. {Eph 4:1-3 RSV}

We are now primarily concerned with the first verse, which constitutes a highly significant exhortation to Christians. This whole passage is a greatly condensed summary of the reason why the church exists and a statement of what its function should be. But before we consider this more closely, we must see how the apostle describes himself in presenting this whole matter:

He calls himself "a prisoner for the Lord," or a prisoner of the Lord.

Remember that this letter to the Ephesians was written from the city of Rome where Paul was

awaiting trial before the emperor on charges of inciting riots, with the implication even of treason against the emperor himself. These charges had been preferred against him by the Jews in Jerusalem at the time of the seizure of Paul in that dramatic encounter he had with the Jewish leaders in the city of Jerusalem. After languishing for two years as a prisoner in Caesarea, he had been sent at last on a very perilous sea voyage which ended in shipwreck, but, at last, he arrived at Rome. There he lived in a home, chained to a Roman guard day and night. He was the personal prisoner of Nero, but he never refers to himself as the prisoner of Caesar. He saw beyond the chains, and the guard, and the imperial processes of justice, to the controlling hand of Jesus Christ behind all things.

He did not fret about being in prison, being chained, being limited. Read his letter to the Philippians, written in this prison relationship, and you will find it is filled with joy and triumph and the assurance that all is well, for the apostle looked behind the visible things to the invisible things. He says in his letter to the Corinthians, “we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen,” {2 Cor 4:18 RSV}. Why? Because that is where ultimate answers lie, that is where truth is found, there is the explanation behind all visible things. So he does not say, I am the prisoner of Caesar. To say “the prisoner of Caesar” would be a superficial explanation, and Paul is never superficial. Behind Caesar is Christ.

The Lord Jesus himself reflected this same attitude when he stood before Pilate. Pilate said to him, “Do you not know that I have the power to crucify you?” And Jesus said, “You could have no power except it be given you from above,” {cf, John 19:11}.

This has a direct bearing upon the issue Paul is discussing in this passage, the purpose of the church. The whole explanation for the confusion about the church that exists so widely today is that Christians have been looking at the things that are seen instead of the things that are unseen. Here is our human race, with suffering and need obvious everywhere. Hate and bigotry abounds in our world. Injustice prevails and misery exists everywhere you turn. And over here is a group of people, the church, who talk about love, compassion, sympathy and help.

The obvious answer to human need is to let this group of people that are so concerned in this area

get to work and do something about it. Let them meet the need, directly and positively. It sounds so logical, so consistent, so practical. But that is because we are so superficial. We only see the things that are visible. In our shallow concern for externals we treat symptoms and not causes, and, therefore, we apply superficial remedies that work only for the moment – if they work at all – and then the situation is as bad again.

Well, what is the answer of the apostle to this? What does he say the church should do in the face of the desperate demands of human need? His answer is, “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

Now, what does he mean? He means, “Obey your orders!” Take your direction from the head of the church. Follow the divine strategy, not the obvious shallow counsel of men. The church is not expected to devise its own strategy or to set its own goal. The church is not an independent organization existing by means of its own strength, as human organizations do. One can never understand this body that exists in human society unless you view it as more than an organization.

Think of the figures the apostle uses for the church in this very letter:

- The church, he says, is an army under the command of a king, and an army that will not obey its leader is useless as a fighting force.
- The church is a body under the control of the head, and what a tragedy it is when the human body refuses to respond to the direction of the head.
- The church, he says, is a temple for the exclusive habitation and use of a Person who dwells within, who has the right to do with that habitation as he wills.

So this is the word of the apostle to us: “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” Follow the goal that has been set before you by your leader. Obey the directions of the Head. Obey your orders!

We are not left in doubt as to what that calling is. It is here in the first three chapters of this letter and scattered in many other places in the New Testament. The first three chapters of this letter

are devoted to the task of describing what Christians have in Christ, as compared with their former condition in darkness and defeat in the kingdom of Satan, and to what end and purpose this is all designed. This is always the structure of a Pauline letter. He begins with telling people the truth (the truth is nothing but what we call doctrine); but is that which forms underlying foundations. How foolish it is to start with anything but truth. There are those today who tell us that we should start with anything but truth. There are those today who tell us that we should start with some kind of dream, an idea, whether it be true or not; and, building on that illusion, we are to work out practical solutions to our problems. The apostle never does this, he starts with the truth, the truth as it is, things as they really are. He calls us back to reality.

That is the glory of Christianity: It is a setting forth of things as they actually exist. In these first three chapters you have a marvelous statement of reality. Read these chapters through. It simply exhausts human language to set forth the great realities that the Christian and the church, as a body of Christians, possess in Jesus Christ. In these three chapters there are several very clear statements of the purpose of the church, not merely its purpose in eternity, some day, but its purpose in time, right now. If we want to know what that purpose is let us observe these statements. Let me quickly run through these first three chapters and point out some of these statements.

In Chapter 1, the apostle says,

Even as he [Christ] chose us in him before the foundation of the world [this is no afterthought with God. The church was planned long before the world was made], that we should be holy and blameless before him. {Eph 1:4 RSV}

The moral character of God's people is a primary essential in understanding the nature of the church. We are to be a moral example to the world, reflecting the character of Jesus Christ.

Just recently I read of two American men who were riding on a train in Britain. As you know, the English trains have compartments where six or seven people can be seated. In the compartment with these two men was a very distinguished looking gentleman. The two Americans were quietly discussing this gentleman among themselves. In a

very low tone one of them said, "I would wager money that he is the Archbishop of Canterbury." The other man said, "I don't think so. I'll take that bet." So the first man approached the gentleman and said, "Sir, would you mind telling us, are you the Archbishop of Canterbury?" The man turned and said, "You mind your own blankety blank business! What the blank difference does it make to you?" And the first American turned to the other and said, "The bet's off! There's no way of finding out." – which is but to suggest that Christians ought to be evident by the way they talk and live, the way they think and act! We are designed to do so, to be "holy and blameless before him." That is one of the purposes of the church.

Look at Verse 12 of the same chapter:

we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. {Eph 1:12 RSV}

Think of that! We who first hoped in Christ, we Christians, have been destined and appointed (here is our calling) to live for the praise of his glory. The first job of the church is not the welfare of men, important as that may be, and as it definitely enters into the picture. But that is not the first thing. The first thing is that we may live to the praise and the glory of God. As the New English Bible puts it, we "should cause his glory to be praised," {Eph 1:12b NEB}.

Well, what is God's glory? It is the story of what God is and does. The problem with this world is that it does not know God. It has no knowledge of him. In all its seeking and wanderings, its endeavors to discover truth, it does not know God. But the glory of God is to reveal the himself, to show what he is like, and the story of what God is and does is the glory of God. You have that in Second Corinthians where the apostle is commenting on this very fact. He says,

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. {2 Cor 4:6 RSV}

That is where you see the glory of God, in the face of Christ, in his character, in his being.

In this same chapter, the fourth verse confirms this,

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God. {2 Cor 4:4 RSV}

Now that is the job of the church, to declare the glory of God, the gospel of God's grace and character.

You have it again in Chapter 1 of Ephesians, Verses 22-23:

... he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. {Eph 1:22-23 RSV}

The secret of the church is that Christ lives in it, and the message of the church then is to declare him, to talk about Christ.

You have it again in Ephesians Chapter 2, Verses 19-22:

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. {Eph 2:19-22 RSV}

There is the holy mystery of the church, it is the dwelling place of God. He lives in his people. That is the great message.

You have it again in Chapter 3, Verses 9-10. Paul says his ministry is,

to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things: that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. {Eph 3:9-10 RSV}

There are others, beside men, watching the church. This is an important aspect of its ministry.

Then again in Chapter 3, the verses immediately before the passage in Chapter 4 that we are considering, Paul says,

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. ... I therefore, ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, {cf, Eph 3:20 - 4:1 RSV}

Now that is clear, is it not?

The calling of the church is to declare by our word and to demonstrate by our lives the character and the work of Jesus Christ who lives within.

We are to talk about the reality of a life-changing encounter with a living Christ, and to demonstrate that change by an unselfish love-filled life. That is why the apostle goes on,

with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. {Eph 4:2-3 RSV}

That is the calling of the church.

Notice how the Lord Jesus himself confirms this in the opening chapter of Acts. Just before he ascended he said to his disciples,

"... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." {Acts 1:8 RSV}

There is the calling of the church, to be witnesses of Christ.

A witness is one who declares and who demonstrates. Peter has a wonderful word about this in his first letter, Chapter 2, Verse 9:

... you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. {1 Pet 2:9 RSV}

That is the job of the church.

Notice, this is always addressed to the individual Christian. It is amazing, is it not, that the church is never addressed as a body in the Scriptures, but always as individual units within a body. Therefore the responsibility to fulfill this calling of the church belongs to every true Christian:

- All are called,
- All are indwelt by the Holy Spirit,
- All are expected to fulfill their calling in the world.

This is the first and clearest note the apostle sounds throughout this whole letter. The expression of the church's witness may sometimes be corporate, but the responsibility to do so is always individual.

Now, does this not help us in this great question of what the church is here to do?

Why does it exist in the world?

Where is our emphasis to be put, where shall we start in this job of influencing the world?

Well, in Scripture, the only message that the church has for the world is the gospel. It has nothing to say about politics or substandard housing or civil rights or labor-capital squabbles or anything of the sort – not because Christians are unconcerned in this realm. Obviously you cannot have a heart filled with love for fellow human beings and not be concerned. The attitude that shrugs its shoulders and says “I am indifferent to these things” is horribly sub-Christian. No, the church says little about these things because the Christian knows that the only way to help in these problems is to introduce a new dynamic, the life of Jesus Christ. This is what men need. When those involved in these problems experience this, the testimony of history again and again has been that the problems begin to be solved. They are worked out by the dynamic of a new life that has been introduced into the situation.

Now, we must start there. Arthur Brisbane says a very interesting thing in one of his columns.

We may sweep the world clean of militarism, we may scrub the world white of autocracy, we may carpet it with democracy and drape it with the flag of republicanism. We may hang on the walls the thrilling pictures of freedom: here, the signing of America's Independence; there, the thrilling portrait of Joan of Arc; yonder the Magna Carta; and on this side the inspiring picture of Garibaldi. We may spend energy and effort to make the world a paradise itself where the lion of capitalism can lie down with the proletarian lamb. But if we

turn into that splendid room mankind with the same old heart, deceitful and desperately wicked, we may expect to clean house again not many days hence. What we need is a peace conference with the Prince of Peace.

As the old proverb puts it,

You can bring a pig into the parlor but that doesn't change the pig – though it certainly changes the parlor!

You can see the primacy of declaring the gospel in the lives of our Lord and the apostles:

Where in the New Testament do you find any programs suggested for social betterment? That silence needs to be faced seriously, for the days in which our Lord and the apostles lived were no different than today. They were surrounded with grievous social issues, as we are, but never is there any direct approach to these problems suggested.

Where are Christians told to demand of government leaders correction of the evils and abuses that were so widespread throughout their land? If anything the opposite is given to us. Look at Ephesians 6, Verses 5-7:

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eyeservice, and men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, {Eph 6:5-7 RSV}

How different that is from what it is suggested the church should be saying in relationships like this today! When did Jesus Christ ever tell the disciples to organize a picket line, or to boycott a business, or conduct a lay-in? – proper as these things may be in this world from other points of view. But they are not Christian. That is the thing we need to face. The word of the Lord is,

“Bless those that persecute you, do good to those who hate you, overcome evil with good.” {cf, Rom 12:14, Matt 5:44, Rom 12:21}

The amazing yet unquestioned fact of history is that by these seemingly indirect methods, and these apparently weak approaches, the Christian church,

when it has been faithful to them, has, from time to time, and place to place, drastically and powerfully changed the whole fabric of human society.

One of the famous books of all time is Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He traces what happened to that mighty empire and how it disintegrated from within. In that book is a passage that Winston Churchill memorized by heart because he felt it so descriptive. Gibbon says this concerning the Roman Empire:

While that great body was invaded by open violence or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigor from opposition, and finally erected the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the capital.

On the other hand, whenever the church has forsaken the gospel message, and has turned to direct techniques to relieve human misery as its chief end of existence, it has always been weak and powerless. Its voice is not heard and eventually it is despised and ignored. In his monumental *History of the World*, Will Durant compares the influence of Caesar and Christ. He says of Jesus,

The revolution he sought was a far deeper one, without which reforms could be only superficial and transitory. If he could cleanse the human heart of selfish desire, cruelty and lust, utopia would come of itself and all those institutions that rise out of human greed and violence and the consequent need for law, would disappear. Since this would be the profoundest of all revolutions, beside which all others would be mere coup d'états of class ousting class and exploiting in its turn, Christ was, in this spiritual sense, the greatest revolutionist in history.

This is a revolutionary age.

The hurricane winds of change are everywhere blowing in our world. The race seethes with unrest and lawless rebellion. What are Christians to do in this hour?

Should we surrender the greatest revolutionary message the world has ever heard, which can come to it from no other source, and content ourselves with doing what any worldling can do?

Shall we become nothing more than another political action group, or succumb to the fallacy that change, any kind of change, represents progress? God forbid!

What the apostle desires is that we heed our calling,

- That we renew our commitment to the Lord who is behind all things to become individually responsible to tell this radical, revolutionary, life-transforming, life-changing good news throughout society;
- That we should invade commercial and industrial life, education and learning, the arts and family life, morals and government with this tremendous, unequalled message.

Ask any Christian what is the greatest thing that ever happened to him in his life. Without hesitation he will reply, when he came to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Then the second question naturally follows, what is the greatest thing he can tell anybody? How to come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

Christians are not to witness in arrogance and rudeness, not in holier-than-thou smugness, not in sanctimonious presumption, and certainly not against the continual background of ugly church fights and harshness and sharpness between Christian and Christian. But, as Paul says,

with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. {Eph 4:2-3 RSV}

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. {Eph 4:1 RSV}

Prayer:

Our Father, we pray that these words may ring in our ears these days when so much is being said to the contrary. Help us to see that the only impact we can have in this world is by being faithful to the message which has been given to us that in doing so we become the instrument of introducing into this world an element, a dynamic that

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no other group can introduce, and without which all the attempts at reform are useless and weak. Lord, we pray that we may keep life in perspective and hold truth in

focus and be faithful to thee who has called us to be thy representatives, the manifestation of thy life in this world. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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The Cry for Unity

by Ray C. Stedman

In this present series, we are concerned with the great questions the Apostle Paul is answering in Ephesians 4 about the fundamental nature and purpose of the church, and its relationships to the world in which it must live. You will recognize these as pertinent questions of the present hour as well. We are being told today that the church is irrelevant (I wonder if there was ever a more over-worked word than that), that it is a useless appendage to a society which has long outgrown the need for the church. Well, let us be perfectly honest and admit there are churches that justify a view like that.

There are others who say that the church is very much needed in this hour, but it must change its approach if it is going to be meaningful (there is another overworked word) in our generation. They say that the church must forget its attempts to teach men about God, and invisible supernatural things, and exist only for the service of humanity. Again we must be honest and admit that there has been considerable weakness in this area of the practical application of the life of the church. But all of these misconceptions of what the church is arise because the church itself has forgotten its calling.

That is what the apostle reminds us of here. The church does not have the right to chart its own course. Its goal has already been set; its purpose has been determined by its Lord. Paul puts it this way,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3 {RSV})

There is another set of voices in our day that seize on this word *unity*, and say, "Here is the cause of the church's weakness: It is our lack of unity. If we could only get together then we would have a powerful church again. The problem is, we are so fragmented, we are so divided, so broken. Out of our disunity we have nothing to say to the world, therefore the church lives in weakness and is held in contempt by our society. Our need, therefore, above all other needs, is to unite. There is power in numbers and if we can get enough Christians together we can influence society as the church was intended to do." Out of that concept has arisen what many are calling today the age of ecumenism, a word which essentially means universal, an age when the church seeks to be a universal church and thus to have an ecumenical body. There are those who pursue this to such an extent they are called *ecumaniacs*.

Now, someone says, "What is wrong with that? Is this not exactly what the Apostle Paul is urging, that we maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? In other parts of the Scripture does he not speak of the need of Christians to get together? Why not welcome these efforts to produce unity? Surely the union of all Christians can only strengthen and help the cause of Christ!" Well, let us examine this passage closely, and see if this is what he is saying, and whether it justifies that approach.

In Verse 3, the apostle declares for us two great facts about the church that are clearly evident. First, there is the clear recognition of the existence of differences among Christians. He says we should be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but there would be no need for that exhortation if there were not differences existing, if there were not pressures to break

up, if there were not forces at work to divide the Christian body.

The word *eager* here is a bit too weak. The original word means, “to give diligence.” Eagerness merely implies willingness, but the original word means “willingness plus activity” – doing something about it. Perhaps the King James translation is more accurate: “earnestly endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” {cf, Eph 4:3 KJV}.

I know you will agree that it is unrealistic for Christians to pretend there are no differences among themselves. Thank God there is no group in the world so gloriously heterogeneous as the church. Its glory is that it is made up of different kinds of people. In the church of Christ the rich and poor alike are to gather on the same basis, without distinction and certainly without favor – slaves and freemen, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, black, red, white, or yellow, it is to make no difference. This is not the way the church has always been, but this is the way the church ought to be. The church crosses all the boundaries that men erect and all natural distinctions and gathers all kinds of people, without exception, into one body. There is no other grouping in the world that attempts to unite people from such widely variant origins and sources.

But we do not ignore these boundaries easily. Friction often arises because of them. It was there in the 1st century, as you can see in several places in the Scriptures. In the letter to the Philippians are named two ladies who could not get along with each other, Euodia and Syntyche (or, as it has been rendered, Odious and Soontouchy), who had trouble working together. There were distinctions of personality then, and they still exist here in the 20th century. As I have often reminded you, the church is well described in the little jingle:

To dwell above with saints we love,
O that will be glory
But to dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

There are differences of gifts within the body of Christ, and each Christian has a tendency to deprecate others' gifts and to exalt his own. We feel that what we are contributing is the important thing and others' contributions are not as important. So there is fertile ground for friction, and dif-

ferences and distinctions will arise within the church.

But, in this verse, there is a second fact very evident: Beneath the differences there is also the fact of a basic unity. You notice the apostle does not say “eager to produce the unity of the Spirit,” but, “eager to maintain the unity.” We are never told to produce unity in the church. There is a unity that is already there by virtue of the very existence of a church. There is no need to create it, in fact we are unable to create unity. Here is the trouble with the modern movement today. By and large, those who are striving to produce unity in the church are ignoring this unity the New Testament mentions, and trying to produce another. Paul calls this, the unity of the Spirit, by which he means: It is produced, created, by the Holy Spirit working in the human spirit. The church has power because of this indwelling Spirit who is the Spirit of God himself. That is what creates unity. The ecumenists are trying to create a unity of the flesh, an organizational unity which draws its power from the number of bodies which can be joined together, quite apart from conviction and spiritual agreement. Dr. Bernard Ramm says,

When the modern groups deny the supernatural character of Christ the church becomes a society, a natural, human, nonsupernatural, religious community. It is bound together by purely natural ties, such as a common heritage in the Bible, a common belief in some sort of uniqueness in Jesus, a common belief in the historical continuity of Christians, and a common ethic of love. Now the church is a society, but this is secondary to its being the supernatural body of Christ.

This is the difference that needs so clearly to be pointed out these days. The church is not a conglomeration of individuals who happen to agree upon certain things. It is bound together as an organism in a bodily unity. It cannot therefore derive power from the association of individuals in a society. Someone has well described that as an attempt to put all the corpses into one cemetery, and thus make for a resurrection. But it cannot work. The church is intended to be an instrument of life, but putting dead bodies together does not produce life.

There are, in another way of putting it, two kinds of unity. One is an internal unity which

manifests occasional external disagreement. I remember the first time I ran into that kind of unity. As a boy I had two friends who were brothers, only a year apart in age. One day we were out playing around and these brothers fell to quarreling between themselves. I thought that one fellow was a bit sarcastic and so I chimed in on behalf of the underdog. To my amazement he did not welcome my help but turned on me and his brother joined him and both jumped on me. I discovered I had made a very shallow judgment. I felt the differences they were airing represented a fundamental disagreement between them, but they did not mean that at all. Underneath there was a fundamental unity, and the moment I attacked one of them, it manifested itself and they turned upon me. That is the unity of the church, an internal unity with occasional external disagreement. But there is also an external unity without internal agreement. By the very nature of the case, control and direction in this kind of a group always rests with a small number at the top whose power is measured by how successful they are in getting the mass to follow them. One is the unity of shared life, the other is a unity of imposed direction – and that is a vital difference.

Now, in Verses 4-6 of this chapter, the apostle is describing the real unity of the body of Christ. We could spend a great deal of time with each one of these elements but I am anxious that we see them as a whole, so I shall run rapidly through these seven elements of unity.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. {Eph 4:4-6 RSV}

That is the unity of the body. You notice that it gathers about the three Persons of the Trinity, the Spirit, the Son, and the Father. Now, let us quickly look at these one by one:

1. First, there is one body. Notice the apostle does not say one organization. A body is an organization, this is true, but it is much more than an organization. The essence of a body is that it consists of thousands of cells with one mutually shared life. It is the sharing of life

that makes a body different than an organization. The basic, fundamental, underlying unity of a body exists despite surface divisions. Anyone who has had the privilege, as I have had, of contacting the body of Christ in widespread places around the earth, soon learns to recognize this fundamental unity among Christians.

I was recently at a weekend conference of forty pastors from twelve different denominations, and we had a wonderful time together for three days. Though we came from twelve distinct denominational groups, and probably represented widely varying degrees of theological viewpoint on many issues, there was a mutual life in Christ that was immediately evident. There was a sense of belonging to each other.

This is often discernible even when there is an official denial of this unity. A number of years ago I met with a Catholic bishop in Mexico and spent an hour or two in fellowship with him talking about the things of Christ. I was a Protestant and he was a Catholic. There has been, as you well know, a long-standing history of disagreement between the Catholic and Protestant points of view. I am sure, had we gone into these areas, we would have found differences. But with this particular bishop there was a sense immediately of the oneness that we shared together in Christ. We talked about him. Our organizations were not one, but we were one, because we had entered together into the experience of the unity of the Spirit, produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit.

A body is not produced by combining sections of anatomy together. Contrary to the popular Negro spiritual, a body is not produced by the toe bone being joined to the ankle bone and the ankle bone to the foot bone and the foot bone to the knee bone, etc. A body is produced by the extension of one original cell, growing until it becomes a full-fledged mature body, but every cell of which shares that original life. That is the secret of a body – all the parts of it share life together. And that is why the church is not just an organization, it is one body. Only the Spirit can produce it.

2. That brings us to the next element, one Spirit. Here is the great, eternal, invisible Person who

is the power behind the Christian church. The strength of the church never comes from its numbers. This is the mistaken concept that many Christians have today. They think we only influence society and bear impact upon the world as we can gather together enough Christians and thus swing enough votes to sway our legislatures. That is not where the power of the church lies, and it never has. The prophet Zechariah was once confronted with a great mountain which God said would become a plain. When Zechariah began to look around to see how this could happen, where the power would come from, what instruments would be provided to level that mountain and make it into a plain, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts," {Zech 4:6b RSV}. It is the Spirit that is the true power of the church, and there is only one Spirit. He is the same everywhere no matter where the church exists – in every place and in every age. That is why the truth remains unchangeable, the passing of time does not change it. That is why the church is not dependent on many or few, or on the wisdom of its membership. It depends on one thing, the one Spirit.

3. Paul links with this the one hope, the hope "that belongs to your call." These first three things are linked to the Spirit because it is he who forms the body for its final and ultimate goal, which is the one hope of the church. What is that hope? It is expressed hundreds of times throughout the Scriptures. Perhaps the briefest expression of it can be found in Colossians, "Christ in you, the hope of glory," {Col 1:27b RSV}. Glory is the hope of the church. As John puts it, "that we might be like him when we see him at his appearing," {cf, 1 Jn 3:2}. That is the hope of the church – that we should no longer be frail, stumbling, faulty men and women such as we are, but, fulfilling God's intention for manhood, we should be like him, like Christ.

I travel widely, and everywhere I have gone around the world, I have found this to be the one hope of Christians. No matter what their brand, their denominational stamp, their background or origin, their race or color, this is always the one hope. There may be many differ-

ences as to the detail by which this works out, and Christians have much room for disagreement here. There are premillennialists, amillennialists, postmillennialists, and other jaw-breaker names which detail differences of viewpoint, but there is only one final expectation of Christians anywhere in the earth and that is that we will eventually be like Christ.

4. The next group of three gather about the second Person of the Trinity and begins with him, one Lord. Notice the apostle does not say one Savior, though it is true there is only one Savior. But everywhere in Scripture it is only when we acknowledge him as Lord that he becomes our Savior. Therefore the important issue which Paul centers on is that Jesus Christ is Lord. Lord means "ultimate authority." As Paul puts it in the letter to the Philippians, "he was obedient unto death, ... therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father," {cf, Phil 2:9-11 RSV}. He is the supreme person of the universe. There is no other Lord; there will never be another Lord.

Peter puts it bluntly, in Acts 4, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," {Acts 4:12b RSV}. That is why the early Christians could not say, "Caesar is Lord," as the persecutors of the early church attempted to get them to do. That is why the modern Christian cannot say, "Buddha is Lord," or any other person is Lord, only Jesus. The mystery and the marvel of his Person is this: The man Christ Jesus, the man who lived and walked and loved and worked and died among us, whose life-record is given to us in the Gospels, is also Lord of the universe, the supreme being the Lord of all things, the God-man. That is why John, in his letter, says that anyone who denies this is not a Christian, he has the "spirit of antichrist," {1 Jn 4:3}. Paul says a man can only say, "Jesus is Lord" {1 Cor 12:3}, by the Holy Spirit.

5. Now we come to the next, one faith. This is a little more difficult, but I am persuaded that it

is not faith in general, i.e., the ability to believe, because all men have this. There are those who say, "I can't believe," but that is not true, of course. All men can believe, it is that they will not believe. But this is not what Paul is talking about here. He has in view that which is believed, i.e., the body of truth that has been revealed. There is only one body of truth revealed, one faith. It is what Jude speaks of in his letter, "contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" {Jude 1:3 RSV}, i.e., the whole set of revealed facts about Jesus Christ.

Notice this is linked to the Lord Jesus, it is the truth about him. Again, there may be many questions on details, there is much room for disagreement as to meaning, but what Paul is getting at is, there is full agreement everywhere among true Christians that there is a body of truth revealed about Jesus Christ; there is only one set of facts; there is only one faith. There is not a faith for the Jews and another faith for the Gentiles, there is one set of facts for all men everywhere. God has spoken through the prophets and the apostles and the seers, but it all forms one total picture, articulated together, explaining itself. Therefore, there is not a God of the Old Testament versus a God of the New Testament, as we sometimes hear. We cannot say, as some people do say, "Well I have my Christ and you have your Christ." No, there is only one Christ. There is only one historic Jesus. There is only one faith.

6. Now we come to the one baptism, and here there is much apparent disunity. The Baptists say, "Ah, this is water baptism, baptism by immersion only." (The latest sign to appear in Baptist churches now says, "Put a tither in your tank!") The Presbyterians say, "No, you're all wet, sprinkling is the only way." There are other groups that say babies ought to be baptized, while others say, "No, it is only for adults." There seems to be such disunity on this question of baptism. But the amazing thing is, despite this difference over the symbol (and, after all, water baptism, in whatever form, is recognizably and demonstrably a symbol for something else), there is one baptism everywhere agreed upon by the church. It is the baptism of the Spirit, the real baptism of

which water baptism is always a symbol. That baptism is linked here to Jesus Christ because it is baptism into his body. As we read in First Corinthians 12, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" {1 Cor 12:13}, the body of Christ. Or, as Romans 6 puts it, we were "baptized into his death," {Rom 6:3}. We have been made one with him, united with him in all the value of his death and his resurrection. Now that is the one baptism of the church and it is everywhere confessed.

7. Then we come to the last of these seven unities, "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." Here is the ultimate aim of the others. All the rest is, as Peter puts it, "in order to bring us to God," {cf, 1 Pet 3:18}. He is the goal and the aim. The mark that we have found him is that we recognize him as Father, we feel his father-heart. You know how Paul puts it in Romans 8, "We have been given the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" {cf, Rom 8:15 KJV}. John writes his first letter on this theme, that the one mark of a new-born babe in the family of God is that he immediately knows his Father, and calls him Father. What a far cry this is from some of the views of God that are abroad today. God is called the Ground of our being, the Ultimate Cause, the Infinite Mind. He is all these things, it is true. These are not wrong, but they are inadequate. As Paul puts it here, he is above all, and through all, and in all. He is the end and the beginning; he is the beginning and the end. All things exist because of him, all things are trending toward him, all things originated from him. Beautiful language here, and all true. But when you actually know him, you find he can only be properly addressed as, "Our Father which art in heaven," {Matt 6:9 KJV}.

Now, there is the nature of Christian unity. Notice, it is not a union to be produced, but a unity that already exists. These, in other words, are not articles of theological agreement. This should never be put into a creedal statement as though we are to agree to these things and thereby become Christians. No, these are areas of mutual experience. These are things that lay hold of us, not we laying hold of them. These are not debatable. If

anyone challenges or disagrees with these, he is simply manifesting the fact that he is not yet a Christian, because when he becomes a Christian he will experience these things. He may not be able to articulate them clearly, but he will understand them when they are set forth. All these are immediately experienced by all who are in Christ. Therefore, the way to create unity is simply to bring men to Christ and the unity of the Spirit will be produced in them by the Spirit. It is impossible to make any meaningful or significant union apart from this unity which is only produced by the Spirit.

Now there are certain practical conclusions that come from a passage like this. As we apply this great, central truth to the outer areas of our life, especially as we confront with it the problems of our modern existence in this generation, there are certain things that are immediately evident:

- First, we cannot classify Christians by organizations. We cannot say that everyone who belongs to the Baptist Church, for instance, are Christians, but all those who are Catholics are not. We cannot say that all those who belong to the World Council of Churches are Christians while all those who belong to the Independent Fundamental Churches of America are not. This is all wrong. God's Spirit forever overleaps human boundaries. The unity of the Spirit will be found in people in many different groups, and we have to recognize that. We will find Christians everywhere and it becomes our responsibility to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with Christians wherever we find them. As Paul says in Romans 14, "Him that is weak in the faith" – what? Cast him out? No, "receive him!" {Rom 14:1 KJV}. Receive him, even though he does not see as clearly as you do and has not graduated from the right seminary. Nevertheless, receive him. Recognize him as a brother if he manifests this experience of the unity of the Spirit, no matter what his label may be.
- A second conclusion from this study suggests that true Christians (i.e., those who have entered into this unity of the Spirit), cannot possibly join in an evangelistic endeavor with those who deny this fundamental unity. Why not? Because our actions are determined by our beliefs. These are such fundamental be-

liefs, they so fundamentally affect us, that they set the direction of our life. Where one person accepts these and has experienced them and someone else does not, you have two fundamentally separate directions. You have two people going different ways.

It is impossible, of course, to ride two horses going in opposite directions – to attempt it puts a terrific strain upon the anatomy. This is why the Israelites were ordered not to yoke an ox and an ass together. Why not? Well, they go at two different speeds, they are two different heights, and they would simply chafe one another all the time. It would be cruelty to both to link them together. This is God's way of teaching us, symbolically, that there are fundamental differences of gait and direction – that two cannot walk together except they be agreed.

There are areas and levels of cooperation that we can have with those who do not share this unity. After all, though we may not be one in the body of Christ, we are one in sharing human life. We can join with them as human beings in relief of human ailments, in healing, in government, in education, and many other enterprises in life. We are not to shut ourselves away from them because we do not share the same life in Christ. Someone says, "Can we worship together with people like this?" Yes, we can. God commands all men everywhere to worship him. Wherever someone is worshipping God as supreme and not some lesser concept of him, as an idol, then Christians can join together with them in worship. But in the enterprise of proclaiming the great life-changing message of the church, then we cannot work together, for their understanding of the gospel is entirely different from ours. What they are attempting to do among men is entirely different – we go in opposite directions.

- Now there comes a third very practical application of this. The efforts of Christians are not to be directed toward creating unity, but toward maintaining peace in the body. That is the way the Apostle Paul puts it, "eagerly endeavoring to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

It is important that Christians not be quarreling, bickering, and struggling against one

another, filled with resentment and hate. A church that is like that is a totally ineffective body in its community. A church that has that kind of activity going on in its midst will have nothing to say to the world that the world will pay any attention to. It is important that when Christians meet together they recognize that they are called to understand one another, to forbear one another, to pray for one another, to forgive one another, to be kind, tenderhearted, not holding grudges, not being unforgiving, bitter, resentful, and hateful toward each other. This is where the Spirit aims when he comes into our midst, at the healing of long-standing grudges, deep-seated resentments, and bitter hostilities that are harbored against one another. We must fulfill what the apostle tells us to do, to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The unity is already there, we simply need to get below the surface, behind the differences that are apparent, and then it will be evident. We will discover that, if there has been a work of grace at all, there is a marvelous, underlying, fundamental, foundational unity that will come welling up through all the differences and express itself, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, in

love manifested to the unlovely. That is where our effort must be put.

Prayer:

Our Father, we feel the Spirit of God has been searching our hearts about our attitudes toward one another and toward the world in which we live. We thank you, Father, that it is not our calling to produce a union of Christians or those who call themselves Christians, but rather to discover that unity of the Spirit which is produced only by the Holy Spirit and which already exists. Where it does not exist, Lord, we are not called upon to be judgmental and harsh and cruel, but to evangelize in the spirit of love and grace. And when we do find this unity we are to be forgiving and understanding, holding these great fundamental issues above all else, valuing that other person. Teach us, by thy grace, to live these in practice as well as to preach them. In Christ's name, Amen.

How the Church Works

by Ray C. Stedman

We are examining now Paul's great message to the church to be faithful to its calling. Today the church seems to have lost its sense of identity. Like someone suffering from amnesia, the church is asking, "Who am I, and what am I here for?" The apostle is calling us back to those great purposes of God for which the church was established and still exists. The church has never any right to determine its own goals; it is here because its Lord has put it here. The church is not here primarily to correct the evils of society, but it is here to declare and demonstrate the power of God in Jesus Christ. That will be the most effective thing it can do to correct the evils of society.

In order to act intelligently on this great purpose, every Christian must understand the nature of the church and the way it was intended to function. That applies to us whether we are old or young. I have greatly appreciated the many young people we have in our services Sunday after Sunday, yet I sometimes think there is a tendency on their part to feel that the truth mentioned here applies only to older people. Not so. Everyone who is a member of the church of Christ has a direct interest in what the Lord has to say about his body. I urge you to give careful attention as we see how the Lord himself describes the character of his body, and reveals what it is here for, and how it is intended to touch life. You will recognize that great confusion abounds in this area today. This whole matter of what the church is and how it works is a maze of conflicting opinions. If you try to get your theology from newspapers and magazines and other periodicals you will end up hopelessly confused. That is why it is so important to come back to the word of authority. It is time to call attention to the simple wisdom of that modern proverb, "When all else fails, follow directions."

In declaring the nature of the church, the apostle calls attention first to the basic element, the unity of the Spirit, the oneness that already exists in the body of Christ as created by the Spirit. It is not something that we need to produce, but something that is already there but needs to be maintained. If we have that clear it will help us much in understanding this present drive toward ecumenicity. Unity needs to be brought out from the confusion of many divergent viewpoints and schisms and factions within the church, but it is not something that needs to be produced. It is already there.

Let us be perfectly honest and admit that our body maintenance has not been quite all it should be. We have been divided externally many times, but the body of Christ has never been disjointed. As the old hymn rightly puts it,

"We are not divided,
all one body we,
One in hope and doctrine,
one in charity."

Now in the second section of this chapter, beginning with Verse 7, the apostle turns to the functioning of the body. Here he unfolds the great essential fact that makes a church able to function effectively within human society. That fact is the impartation of spiritual gifts to each member of the body of Christ.

Let us read them, in Verses 7-10:

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

**"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."**

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
{Eph 4:7-10 RSV}

In this section we face a most important question. How is the church expected to demonstrate the power of God and thus influence society? Is it by some miraculous, wonder-working, dramatic display of divine power? Is it something that captures the attention of the multitudes by miracles? Or is it by the power of numbers – getting people together to vote the same way and thus exert pressure upon the legislatures to obtain the right kind of legislation? Is that the power of the church? Is it by agitating for change by joining picket lines and sit-ins and walk-outs and rise-ups? Is it by attending conventions devoted to discussions of various things and the passing of resolutions? Well, you notice the apostle does not waste one moment on these kinds of activity. He suggests very clearly that the power of the church lies in each Christian discovering and intelligently exercising the spiritual gift that was given to him when he became a member of the body of Christ. That is largely a forsaken principle today, and that is why the church is so weak. If we ever recover the strength God intended the church to exert in human society, it will be by a return to that simple thing, the exercise of each person’s spiritual gift.

After all, is that not the way a physical body functions? In the body of flesh and bones, there are a variety of cells. There are nerve cells, blood cells, tissue cells, muscle cells, sex cells, hair cells, and many others, each having a distinct and different function. The body operates, not by the cells getting together and voting as to what is the best thing to do, but by simply functioning, by doing what they individually and particularly were designed to do. It is the function of the head to correlate this, and bring it all together, and make it operate effectively, but each cell gives itself to the task of functioning according to its design.

Certainly the body does not operate by the cells revolting. Did you ever experience a rebellion of the muscle cells of your stomach? We call it indigestion! Or a revolt of your brain cells? That is called insanity. It means that the body is sick,

something is wrong with it, it is not operating the way it was intended to do.

This is the whole problem with the church today. In so many places it has forgotten it is a body and has tried to operate as another human organization, therefore it has no more power than any other human organization at work in the world. But the apostle reminds us that the fundamental secret of the operation of the church is that each true Christian has a gift.

“Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” It is our responsibility to recognize and fulfill that gift. He lays emphasis here on the word *each*. In the original Greek it is *each one of us*, and the word *one* is in the emphatic place, the first word in the Greek sentence. He is tying this all in with the unity of the Spirit which he has just described. There can be no exceptions to this universal gift – receiving. If you are a Christian, if you have received Jesus Christ, if you are born again, if you have new life by the Spirit of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you have a spiritual gift. Whether you are old or young, rich or poor, or quite regardless of your status in society, you have a spiritual gift. If you do not have a spiritual gift, you are not a Christian. The church begins to live, and exercise its impact and influence upon society, when you begin to exercise your gift.

We need to note immediately that there are two kinds of gifts mentioned here in Verse 7. One Paul calls the measure of the other. “But grace (that is the first gift) was given to each of us, according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Or more literally, “the gift of Christ.” I put it in that order because the gift of Christ is the more basic of these two and it is really Christ himself. He is not talking about something Christ gives us, but something God has given us, which is Christ, the gift which is Christ himself. As Paul says in First Corinthians, “Thanks be to God for that unspeakable gift!” {1 Cor 9:15}. Because Christ is made known to us by the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, it is equally right to call this the gift of the Holy Spirit. Scripture uses that phrase as well. The basic gift is the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ within each believer. That is what makes us Christians. If the Spirit of God is not there, we are not Christians at all. As Paul says to the Romans, “He that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his,” {cf, Rom 8:9 KJV}. Though he is religious, though he is a member of a church, though he attends all the

meetings and has signed his name to the register and goes through all the ceremonies, if he has not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his. That is essential.

But now there is also this “grace” which is mentioned here, “grace was given to us.” This is the gift of the Spirit to each Christian as a special ability or capacity for service. It is to be exercised according to the measure of Christ’s presence within. Now, we will see more of that in a moment, but right now I want to look more closely at this word, *grace*. The Greek word is *charis*, which means simply “grace,” and is used that way many times in Scripture. There is also a related word, *charisma*. Now you hear a great deal these days about the “charismatic movement” and the “charismatic gifts.” People who use those terms almost invariably refer to the exercise of the gift of tongues (or at least that which purports to be the gift of tongues) today. But that is piracy of a title. The *charisma* is not just the gift of tongues. Tongues, in fact, is at the very bottom of the list of *charismata* in First Corinthians 12. The charismatic gifts include all the gifts of the Spirit beginning with those mentioned here: apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers, as well as other lists elsewhere in Scripture. These are the charismatic gifts, given to individuals in the body of Christ as special abilities or capacities to serve. You will find a partial list here and another, more complete list, in First Corinthians 12; still another list in Romans 12 (including duplications); a brief list in First Peter 4; and isolated references elsewhere in the New Testament.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to his son in the faith, Timothy, and said, “Stir up the gift that is in you, which was given to you” {cf, 2 Tim 1:6 KJV}, he uses this very word: *charisma*, “‘the grace’ that was given to you.” Of himself, he said in Ephesians 3:8, “To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” The gift of preaching was one of his gifts.

- Do you know what your gift is?
- Have you ever asked yourself this question: “What is the gift God has given to me since I am a Christian? What does he want me to do as a general area of ministry?”

- Do you know how to recognize a gift?
- Do you know how to develop it once you know what it is?

The impact of this church in this area is directly related to how you answer those questions. Your own joy and fulfillment as a Christian depends on how you answer those questions.

In the next message I want to look at these gifts in detail. We desire to be helpful in this area by pointing out exactly what these gifts are. We shall take these various lists and unfold our Lord’s plan to develop these and use them according to the Lord’s intention. That is what makes a church strong, what makes it powerful, what makes it possible for a church to change the life of its neighborhood and make an impact upon society.

But now, a word about the second gift which is mentioned here as the measure and limit of the *charisma*, the special ability given by the Spirit. Why does the Apostle Paul introduce in this connection these words about Christ’s ascension and his previous descension to the earth?

Why does he quote from the 68th Psalm these words, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men?” {cf, Psa 68:18}. Why does he lay this emphasis on Christ’s triumphal march, his leading of a host of captives in his train? It is because Verses 8-10 are an amplification and an explanation of the phrase, “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” He is telling us what this means. A gift is one thing; the power to operate it is quite another. Now he is bringing these two together. Gifts are specialized functions, as we will see when we come to the various lists. They are the ability to do certain specific things, such as teaching, preaching, helping, administering, ruling, etc.

These gifts are like so many electrical appliances. What a variety of appliances are available today! There are electric toasters, toothbrushes, mixers, irons, razors. I even saw an advertisement the other day for an electric shoestring tier! But if you look carefully at these electrical appliances you will see that though they are vastly different in what they do, there is one thing in which they are always exactly alike: They all have a cord with a plug on one end, designed to plug into a receptacle by which they utilize the same power. No matter how different the appliance is, the power is the

same. If you look at the appliance very carefully you will also note another difference. Each appliance uses a different degree of power. Some are marked for 50 watts, some use 100 watts, some 200 watts, some 500 watts. The degree of power that is needed to operate the appliance is usually stamped on each.

At wedding showers young couples are often given many different electrical appliances. As they go through their gifts the things begin to stack up (many of them duplicates), three or four toasters, two or three irons, and when they get through they could well say what would amount to a parody of this verse, Ephesians 4:7, "But appliances were given to us to use according to the measure of the power needed."

Now that is exactly what Paul is saying. Graces, he says, are given to us to use according to the measure of the power available. What kind of power do you need to operate the gift which God has given to you?

- Do you need the power of a strong personality? There are evidently many who think so. There are many people who are not using the gift God has given them because they think it requires a strong personality to do so, that in order to be useful to Jesus Christ, they must be some kind of an extrovert. If they have an outgoing, extroverted personality they can expect to be used, but not otherwise. But if that is the power that is required, obviously there are many who never stand a chance. Even those who have that kind of a personality will find occasions when they do not feel very outgoing.
- Well then, is it the power of positive thinking? We read much about that today. Do we need to read certain books and develop our inner attitudes in such a way that we are always thinking positively and never negatively, and thus become able to be useful to Jesus Christ? Well, if that is the kind of power it takes then obviously it is never available if we happen to be in a depressed or negative mood.
- Then is it the power of keen intellect, a well-trained, educated mind, sharpened and honed to the nth degree by the resources of modern knowledge? Some of us have never had these

advantages; others are born with a low IQ. No, it is none of these.

We need a power different from any of these and superior to all circumstances. We need power that is not affected by education, either the presence of it or the lack of it. We need power that is independent of moods or feelings. Is there such a power? It is mentioned at the close of Chapter 3:

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. {Eph 3:20 RSV}

Do you believe that the church has a power within it that is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think? Paul claims it for himself in Chapter 3, Verse 7,

Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace [there it is again, 'a grace' given to him] which was given me according to the working of his power. {Eph 3:7 RSV}

What kind of power is this? Remember the word in Philippians 3 where the apostle is speaking of the great desire of his heart, and he cries, "O that I may know him and the power of his resurrection!" {cf, Phil 3:10}. There it is. The power of his resurrection! That is why the apostle links the gift of God with the descent of Christ, incarnation, and his ascent again to the throne of power after his resurrection.

It required all that in order that you might have the gift. All the mystery and marvel of the incarnation are involved in the fact that you have a spiritual gift given you when you became a Christian. Though it may be lying neglected and unused in some backroom of your personality, it is the most precious thing Christ has ever given you. It took his descent from glory down to this earth, and all the pain, anguish, heartache and sorrow of his life, culminating in the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross, and then the resurrection and ascension in triumph into the heavens to receive from God the Father these gifts that he might give them to you.

This is no common thing.

The gift that you have is not merely a natural talent, as many others in the world have as well. It is a divinely-given ability requiring resurrection power to exercise it. Resurrection power is the

kind that operates in the midst of death. It works when everything around it is dull, dead, and empty, when there is no need of stimulation that comes from circumstances. It is the kind that needs no props, no outside support, and pays no attention to obstacles, even as Christ paid no attention to the stone in front of his tomb when he came bursting forth. It cannot be stopped or thwarted by any power known to man. That is resurrection power.

That was the way the Apostle Paul operated, it was the power that he found. That is why, as he writes to the Philippians, he can say, “though I am a prisoner, held here, limited by Caesar, the word of God is not bound. Things are happening, the gospel is going forth. Every effort made to stop it is turned by God into an opportunity to advance it,” {cf, Phil 1:12-14}. You cannot stop resurrection power. The only limit the apostle ever found was the limit of his faith to take this power. As faith grew, his effectiveness grew. He did not always see the results, but he knew they were always there. He could say to the Colossians, concerning Christ,

Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me. {Col 1:28-29 RSV}

That is resurrection power.

Here in our church there are many yet undiscovered gifts. There are unused ones. There are people who have been coming here for years, who have been sitting and listening to these great transforming truths, but have never begun to operate for Jesus Christ, have never stepped out and acted in resurrection power, utilizing the gift that God has given them. To that degree the body of Christ in this place is weak and faltering, unable to touch the world around us.

How much have you learned to put on Christ, to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might?

This is how the church moves, this is how it works. This is how the Christian changes society.

Some are called to open, public ministry; others have a ministry more hidden and obscure. Some have simple gifts; others more complex. But every one of them is needed, without exception. Your gift is greatly needed.

All require the same kind of power, and everyone can have as much as he needs if by faith he takes it. This would be the most important thing in the world to us – more important than our standard of living, our success in business, our desire for travel or romance, or whatever.

We know that each of us shall some day stand before the Lord Jesus and the question he will ask us will not be, how high did we get in our company, or how much money did we make, or how well-known did we become, or how extensive our holdings were. The question will be, “What did you do with the gift that was given to you?” You may have turned in a most remarkable performance but did you miss the point? Were you concerned about the development of the gift that cost our Lord the incarnation, his death, and resurrection to obtain for you? Have you used it?

There is nothing more important than what our living Lord has given you as a special gift of his grace. No one else can exercise that gift. No one else can do in the body of Christ what you alone can do.

I think there are some who are afraid to look for their gift for fear they may find it. We do not care to ask ourselves what God has given us because, if we find it, we know we must do something about it and that interferes with the plans we have made. But, as we come to the Lord’s Table, let us come with this one question before us:

- Am I building my life around the gift the Lord has given me by his cross and his resurrection?
- Is this an important matter to me?
- Do I celebrate this Lord’s Table, saying in my heart, “Lord, by thy blood and thy death I have been brought with a price; I am not my own. I have been given a gift and my task is to find it.”

It would be easy to sing, “Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way,” but I tell you, I am sick of singing, “have thine own way.” It is time we stopped singing and started doing, started obeying!

There is a sick world around us, a world that is desperately in need, and the symptoms of that sickness are apparent on every side. We need to hear our Lord saying to us, as he said to his disciples in

the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world.”

Listen to these words from Romans 13:

... the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us cast off the world of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. {Rom 13:12-14 RSV}

Prayer:

Our Father, help us take these words seriously. Forgive us for our selfishness, our desire to live our lives our way and at the same time turn to thee and say, “Lord, we love thee and want to do what you want us to do.” Save us from this kind of hypocrisy. No wonder the tension mounts in our lives, no wonder we feel empty, defeated, and frustrated, while we live such split lives. Teach us to have a single eye, centered on thee and thy word and thy glory. In Christ’s name, Amen.

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What is your Gift?

by Ray C. Stedman

I have a sense of quickening anticipation and of enthusiasm in approaching this passage of Scripture again. It is somewhat akin to the feeling I had when I watched a surgical operation for the first time. It was with a mingled sense of awe and uneasiness that I stood behind the surgeon in an operating room and watched him preparing to do a surgical appendectomy. I watched him draw the scalpel and lay the wound open, and saw his assistants catch the blood vessels to tie them and stop the flow of blood. I watched him open the abdomen and expose the inner organs of the body to my gaze. As I saw them throbbing and pulsating I realized this was a living body being opened before me. I cannot describe the mixed feelings of wonder and excitement, and a bit of sickness, I felt. So in this text of Scripture the Apostle Paul is exposing to us the inner workings of the body of Christ.

It is challenging and exciting to discover how God designed his church to influence the world. There is nothing more pathetic and abortive than Christians who totally miss the understanding of this exciting program for the operation of the body of Christ, and substitute business methods, organizational proceedings and pressure politics as the church's means of influencing society. When we return to what God intended, the church becomes a very wonderful, challenging, exciting thing. The church is not an organization or a religious club. It is a functioning, living organism designed to penetrate society at all levels, and to declare and demonstrate in our world a new kind of power. That power is otherwise totally unknown to men. It is not easily recognized for what it is because it works very quietly. But it is an exceedingly mighty power, the power of resurrection life, the power that is able to bring life out of death.

If there is anything our society is characterized by today it is that it is permeated with a kind of

living death, a death that is part of our daily existence and manifests itself in a sense of despair, of depression, of emptiness, of the futility of living. It is seen in the humdrum of existence, in boredom and the frustration of lives that are longing for a sense of satisfaction and do not know where to turn in the restlessness of our age. It is in the midst of that kind of death that the life of the body of Christ is to be manifested. But this is an exciting day in which to live because in our day and time, in this decade of the 20th century, the Spirit of God is healing a sluggish, ill, and faulty church.

That process of healing is most interesting to watch. I find it happening everywhere. The Holy Spirit is breathing new life into old bones that have lain there so long they have begun to rattle. He is pouring new wine into new wineskins today. There is breaking out in the midst of old established forms of church life new exciting manifestations of the Holy Spirit at work among men. You can sense this everywhere. It is being accomplished by a return to these fundamental principles that the Apostle Paul outlines here in the epistle to the Ephesians concerning the intention of God for his body.

The human body is an amazing arrangement of many quite different functions. We are astounded at the smoothness with which the body articulates a great many functions. There are the major senses of seeing, hearing, speaking, etc., all functioning as a unit in one body. The various organs all work together sharing in a marvelous harmony and yet each one doing something different. That is the characteristic that is so remarkably evident in God's intention for the body of Christ. In the human body every organ is a distinct and peculiar thing, having a function different than anything else in the body. You cannot substitute one organ for another. Did you ever see a surgeon try to replace a defective stomach with a pair of lungs? It cannot

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be done. Every organ must exercise its own function. So every truly converted Christian has a special gift or gifts from God called *charismata*, graces, that God gives him when he becomes a believer in Jesus Christ. That gift is your privileged function within the body of Christ. No one else can do it. Others may have similar gifts but they cannot do what you can do. No one else can do what you can do in the body of Christ.

The Scriptures are very explicit about this. In the passage that is before us, we read in Verse 7, "But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift," {Eph 4:7 RSV}. Each of us! In First Corinthians 12, the apostle reminds us again that it is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit to divide these gifts among his people severally, i.e., to each one, according as he will. So if you are a Christian you have a gift. You do not have to question that, there is no doubt about it. You have a least one, and perhaps more. If you have genuinely come to know Jesus Christ by receiving him as your Lord and Savior and the Holy Spirit of God has taken up his residence in your heart, you have a gift that is your privilege to exercise within the body of Christ.

Your gift may fall in one of the two major divisions within the body. There are certain gifts which might be called general support ministries, from which the whole body receives benefit. There are four of these. Then there is another division of gifts which might be called specific working gifts. We can only take a rapid survey through these now but I want to return to this and go through these carefully and particularly in order that we might understand better what these gifts are, how to recognize them in ourselves and in one another, and how to put them to work.

The support ministries fall into four major categories which are given to us in Verse 11. The apostle says that

his [Christ's] gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. [The last is one gift and should be hyphenated, as pastor-teacher, or teaching pastor. These are given] **for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood** [Is that

not what you want? Maturity? Manhood? Womanhood? As God intended human life to be lived? This is not talking about something religious, it is talking about the fulfillment and satisfying of human life.], **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children [immature], tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, {Eph 4:11-15}**

In order to accomplish this, a definite pattern is prescribed. It is only as we understand and recapture that pattern that this church, or any other church, or the church as a whole, will ever become an effective, powerful, relevant, life-changing organism within human society.

Now let us look at these four functions, the general support ministries. These relate to the whole body very much as the major systems relate to the physical body:

1. First of all, there is in your body, as you know, a basic structure system of muscles and bones. From that the body gets its support. You would be nothing but a rolling mass of gelatine if it were not for that. Our bodies have ability to move because of the bones and the muscles.
2. Then there is another system, the nervous system, by which these bones and muscles are stimulated to activity, galvanized to action, the directive system.
3. Then there is what we call the digestive system, by which food taken into the body is assimilated and made available to the cells of the body. It is by this that the body grows, it is the system that propagates growth.
4. Then there is the circulatory system, the blood with the blood vessels and lymph glands. It is by this system that the body is fed and maintained.

Remarkably enough, the structure of the body of Christ roughly parallels these systems within our human bodies. This is not the definite teaching of

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the Scriptures but there is a rough approximation of the four gifts mentioned here to the four major systems of the human body.

1. There is first the apostolic ministry. “Some are **apostles**,” Paul said. He was one of them himself. It was the job of the apostles to lay foundations, to lay major frameworks, to build the basic support structure around which the rest of the body would be built. That is why the apostles wrote the books of the New Testament, for it is this apostolic ministry that forms the basic support for the life of the body of Jesus Christ. I shall say more about this in later messages for this is only a quick survey.
2. Then there are the **prophets**. A prophet is a man who speaks for God, who unfolds the mind of God. In the early church before the New Testament itself was written, prophets spoke directly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uttering the truths that are now recorded in our New Testament. They were men who unfolded what God taught and thus the body was galvanized and motivated to work. This parallels the nervous system in our human bodies.
3. Then there are the **evangelists** by which the body is built up and grows, men with a special gift for communicating the gospel in relevant, compelling terms to people who are not Christians. There is a sense in which every Christian is to be an evangelist in that he speaks as a witness of his faith. But these evangelists are men and women with a specialized gift who have a wonderful attraction for and ability to speak to people. Billy Graham is outstanding in this field today. He is a true evangelist, for he compels people to listen to the good news of Jesus Christ.
4. Then there are **teaching-pastors**, and these, corresponding to the circulatory system in our body, are designed to maintain the life of the body, to feed it, to cleanse it and to maintain its life in vigor and vitality. The God who designed our human body is the same God who designed the body of Christ, which is to move out through society and penetrate the life of this age! God’s desire is to maintain that body

in health, and that is what the Spirit of God is doing today.

May I add one additional word about these four support ministries, these specialized gifts? We have such a strong tendency to think of these as professional Christians. These are what we call *the clergy* (horrible word) and *reverends*. Almost invariably we include in this class of people only those who have gone through some kind of specialized training school and spend their full time at this kind of work. It does, of course, include that kind of people but it is not limited to that. There are men who have an apostolic ministry today, there are men who have prophetic gifts, there are men who are evangelists, there are men who are teaching-pastors, but not all of them by any means are professional Christians, in full time service. In every church there are those who are engaged in secular work who have these gifts and who are to exercise them as well. I want to make that point clear even in this introductory survey, though I intend to return to it later.

A terrible failure has occurred in the life of the church right at this point. Through the centuries, the church gradually grew away from the simple system which made it such a powerful and compelling influence upon society in its early years, and there came in gradually a terrible distortion from which we are still suffering today. The church became identified with buildings, great massive cathedrals and imposing structures, and these were referred to as *the church*. The popular thinking fastened upon the building as the identifying symbol of the church, instead of the people. Along with that idea there came a gradual transfer of responsibility to do the work of the ministry from the people unto the clergy. Notice that, in the Scripture here, the apostle makes clear that the work of this general support ministry is two-fold. These four support functions exist. Paul says, for equipping the saints in two directions – “unto the work of the ministry” and “unto the building up of the body of Christ.” (In the RSV text the last two occurrences of the word “for” should really be translated “unto.”)

These four support ministries exist for the equipment of the saints unto the work of the ministry (that is contact with the world) and unto the building up of the body of Christ (that is maintaining the health of the church). Who is to do these

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two things? The saints, the people! That is God's intention. It is not the job of the pastors. Their work is something different. They are to train and equip, undergird and motivate the people to do this work. It is the people who are to do the work of the church. Anything less than this is a terrible distortion of what God intended the church to be like.

When this distorted idea crept into the church, it resulted in a terrible situation. The ministry was left to the professionals and the people came to church, not to learn what to do, but to listen, that is all. The pastor has to minister to them, talk to them, encourage them, and try to keep them spiritually healthy, and, at the same time, do all the work of contacting the world: There soon came into being a very destructive idea that the job of the people was to bring the world into the building to hear the gospel and the pastor's job was to preach it to them. Nothing has been more destructive of the life of the body of Christ than that concept. Soon Christianity became a spectator sport, very much akin to the definition I recently heard of football – eleven men down on the field, desperately in need of rest, and forty thousand people up in the grandstand desperately in need of exercise!

No wonder this awful burden (which pastors are largely responsible for in assuming) has exerted a terrible, unbearable pressure upon the pastors, the clergy. They have not been equal to this task and they were never intended to be. Any one pastor who honestly attempted it found himself involved in endless, frustrating, demands so that he cracked under it. That is one of the reasons why there have been so many emotional failures in the ministry.

We need badly to return to the simple principles of the life designed for the body of Christ. The result of its distortion has been a sadly impoverished body which has done little as far as the world is concerned, and has been largely an isolated section of life with a strong religious odor to it that has turned people away. The world holds the church in contempt because it is not doing anything relevant and meaningful in human society. Our need, therefore, is to return to the original pattern.

To turn now to the second class of gifts, the working gifts. I want to simply name them for you. We shall come back to describe them later on in detail, that we might all recognize what the Holy Spirit has done in our individual lives to make this church a working, powerful unit. There are several

lists of the spiritual gifts, the *charismata*, in the New Testament. You will find one in Romans 12, another in First Corinthians 12, and there are brief references elsewhere. When we put these together the list reads something like this:

- There is the gift of **wisdom**. That is the ability to understand how truth applies to specific situations, how to put truth to work.
- There is the gift of **knowledge**. That is the ability to categorize truth, break it up into manageable portions and thus to understand it better.
- There is the gift of **faith**. That is what some call today the gift of vision. It is an idea that grips a man, that some needed goal can be accomplished. He sees it while others do not, and he goes right ahead and does it.
This week, in Washington, I talked with W. Cameron Townsend, the founder of Wycliffe Translators. What an outstanding example he is of a man with the gift of faith, the gift of vision for reaching the world through translating the Scriptures into the language of the isolated tribes of earth. What a great thing God has done through him with that.
- Then there are gifts of **healing**, including physical, mental, or emotional healing.
- There are gifts of **miracles**, and the gift of **prophecy**, which is something quite different than we usually think.
- There is the gift of **discernment**, the ability to see whether a person is a phony or not; the gift of **tongues**, the power to speak in other languages; and the gift of **interpretation of tongues**.
- There is the gift of **helps**, a magnificent gift without which the church would be nothing. (It is called in Romans 12 “the gift of **service**.”)
- Then there is the gift of **administration**, those who have a gift given by God to organize and administrate in spiritual matters. This is “the gift of **ruling**” in Romans 12.

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- There is the gift of **exhortation**, the ability to get people moving, to say things in a way that will motivate people, exhort them.
- Did you know there is a gift of **contributions**? Every believer is to contribute but there are some who have a special gift for this, the gift of making money.
I met a man like that this week, a man who glories in the fact that God gives him, as a business man, the gift of making money, and he has set aside \$20,000 as a special foundation to be used wholly for the training of young men for the work of the ministry. That is a gift.
- There is a gift of showing **mercy**, of visiting a sick room and putting some flowers on the windowsill and making up the bed or cooking a dish, etc., the gift of showing kindness.

There is a wide diversity of gifts, a panoramic range of them.

“Well,” someone is saying, “how do you find the gift that you have, how do you identify your gift?” The answer is: You find spiritual gifts just as you find natural talents. You musicians, how do you know that you have the gift of music? You athletes, how did you ever discover that you had an unusual physical coordination and were able to do athletic exploits that others could not? How did you discover that? Well, you discover spiritual gifts in the same way. Usually you are attracted by seeing certain people exercising a gift, and that draws you to them. You like what you see. Then you try a few different things. You soon discover you do not have a gift for some things at all. With others, you say to yourself, “Perhaps I can do this.” You enjoy some activities more than others, and this is a possible indication. What you enjoy doing is usually what God gives you the privilege of doing, for the exercise of spiritual gifts is a joyful thing to do. People take great pleasure in exercising these gifts, for they are fulfilling and satisfying.

Then you feel a continuing desire to exercise one line of endeavor more than another, and you long to find out more about it. You desire to do this more frequently, and that is an indication. One very important indication is to see if others recognize the gift in you, and encourage you to do it.

Those of mature experience may say, “Look, we feel you have a gift along this line and would like you to take on this job. Would you do it?” It is very important that others recognize your gift. (I remember Dr. H. A. Ironside used to speak of the pathetic situation of those who felt they had the gift of preaching, but no one had the gift of listening!)

Now, most of these gifts are manifest right here in this church, as they are in other churches. The Spirit of God has given them. Not all the gifts, perhaps; that is his choice. He gives as he will, not as we will. We want to see this church a body at work, not only here, where we are ministering to one another and building one another up (that is part of it), but also out there in a quite desperate world. Men do not live lives of quiet desperation anymore, but of open despair – not knowing where to turn or what the answers are. But the ministry of the body is the ministry of Jesus Christ at work in human society. Christ loves this world. He loves the men and women of it. He loves the poor, pathetic, homeless bums that stumble up and down the streets of our big cities in increasing numbers, victims of narcotics, drink, sex, LSD, and perversions of all kinds. He loves hard-driving, hard-headed businessmen who have made a god of success, and have fallen for the illusion that success in life is the great goal, and who ruthlessly ride over anyone who stands in their path. And when they reach that goal and have all their luxury and their big homes, they still have empty hearts and nothing to satisfy them with. He loves them and wants to reach them through us. That is his goal, that is the purpose of the body of Christ.

Someone has said there are 81 million Christians in the world today. Not all of them know all that it means to be a Christian, but there are, perhaps, 81 million Christians. Do you know what that means? That means 81 million opportunities, scattered throughout the world in all levels and classes of society, to manifest the same wonderful life-changing power as was manifest in Jesus of Nazareth in Judea, or Galilee, 1900 years ago. Do you think if that were really happening, that there were 81 million places in this world today where that kind of a life, in quietness, unostentatiousness and yet in power, was being manifest, that this old world would be the same place it is today?

I leave you with that question.

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Prayer:

Our Holy Father, what a gold mine of opportunity we have stumbled on here. What a magnificent plan and program for this world to be helped, changed, and delivered in its utter need. God grant to us to catch something of the excitement and the chal-

lenge of this in our lives. That we might have a part in this, the most revolutionary concept ever given to men. Make us to come alive, Lord, and to realize that you have a place for us that we alone can fill and no one else can do, as a part of this program. Help us then, to learn more about it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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Understanding your Gift

by Ray C. Stedman

Recently I listened to two radio programs, both religious:

One was a panel of pastors and laymen discussing the subject, "Religion in the Space Age." The members of this panel were obviously educated men, suave, cultured. They spoke, with obvious understanding of the times in which we live, about the effects of technology on daily lives, the appeal and challenge of the exploration of the frontiers of science to young people particularly, and the need in this kind of world for faith and morals. But during the entire program of half an hour there was not one mention of Jesus Christ or of the good news of God's plan to give man a new start in life by wiping out the past and beginning with a fresh page. When the program ended I found myself thoroughly angry – angry that there could be a presentation on religion in the space age and nothing be said about the most revolutionary message the world has ever heard and which the church is to proclaim in this day.

The second program consisted of a radio preacher. This man spoke about nothing but Jesus Christ and the good news of the gospel. He had nothing to say on the problem of human life or modern living. But everything he said was delivered in a preachy, whining, half-shouting voice, interspersed with pious exclamations of, "Hallelujah!" "Bless the Lord!" and "Precious Jesus!" His preaching rose and fell in a regular pattern of delivery that sounded like a tobacco auctioneer's chant. I turned off the program, half-sick.

Both these programs were avowedly Christian, both were certainly sincere, both were attempts to confront the world in this mid-twentieth century with the need of faith, and both were horribly misleading and distorted.

Now, admittedly, I encountered two extremes in this respect, but both these types of programs are widespread today and their existence reveals something startling and provocative. They reveal the extent to which the church has been brainwashed. We normally attribute brainwashing techniques only to the Communists, but the original brainwasher was Satan and he has been busy at it ever since creation. He is an expert at infiltrating wrong ideas into the human mind, and so distorting and twisting the truth, that it comes out quite different than it really is. Through the centuries this has happened to the church. We have departed from "the pattern of sound words" {2 Tim 1:13 RSV} recorded by the Scriptures. The church has become something less than God intended it to be. We have followed our own ideas and our own approaches to the world in which we live, and have distorted the pattern God has devised. Therefore we have come up with something far astray from the original blueprint of the Word of God.

The church is still the church, still the body of Christ, but it has become affected by this brainwashing technique to the point that it has forgotten the divine method for reaching the world. If anything good should come out of this "God is dead" movement we are hearing so much about today, it will be the realization that the church has failed to convey to the world the striking, remarkable, transforming message of the good news of Jesus Christ. That is the reason people think God is dead. They have looked at the church where they would expect to find clear evidence that God is alive, but they have not found it. They have found instead the same kind of problems that beset their own lives. They have found the same critical attitude toward difficulties and hardships. They have found in the

church the same biting, carping, judgmental unloveliness toward one another that is so characteristic of the world. They have said, "If that is Christianity, then it is no different from what we already have. If this is supposed to be the sign that God is alive, then we can only conclude that God must be dead." We can listen understandingly, and even with a sense of personal condemnation, to these extreme ideas that are circulated today in the realm of theology. It is no good pointing the finger at these people and saying they are off base. Obviously they are, but the question is, "Why are they off base?" Is it because the church is also off base?

It is with this problem the Apostle Paul comes to grips in Chapter 4 of the epistle to the Ephesians. We are looking at this chapter together and rediscovering the pattern of God's intended working through the church, which is Christ's body. In particular we have come to Verses 11 and 12 which concern the gifts Jesus Christ has given to the church. We read in, Verse 11,

... his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ. {Eph 4:11-12 RSV}

We are focusing our attention primarily on the greatly neglected matter of equipping the saints. It may come as a shocking surprise to many of you that it was never God's intention for pastors to visit all the sick, comfort the bereaved, preach to the lost, or teach the newly converted. All these are part of what is called here "the work of the ministry and the building up of the body of Christ." We shall spend some time demonstrating that this is the case, from the Scriptures.

Perhaps no concept has been more damaging to the effectiveness of the church than the idea that the business of Christian people is to get non-Christians to come to church. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is not what they are expected to do. The business of Christian people is to take the good news of Jesus Christ out to where people are, and once they become Christians out there, then they are to come to church. Now this does not mean that we shut the doors of the church to anyone who comes in as a non-Christian. They are perfectly welcome – but they should come with

the understanding that they are coming into a Christian gathering to hear what Christians believe, and learn what Christians find in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church.

Every local church is expected to give itself to the task of doing two things – evangelizing outside the church and building up the body of Christ within by teaching and living in fellowship one with another. In line with that, I would like to call your attention to the statement on the back of our bulletin, the last paragraph of which says,

This church advocates both evangelism *and* edification. People must be saved by grace through faith, but, having been saved, they must be faithfully helped to grow in grace. The two-fold task of every church is evangelism *and* edification. Not a lopsided stress on one but the consistent practice of both.

That statement reflects clearly the truth of the passage we are now considering.

Let us now look at what the Word of God reveals on this problem of how the church should reach the world. The answer of the Holy Spirit to this question is to give every Christian, without exception, a special gift of ministry – a capacity for service which he never had before he became a Christian. Along with this, the Holy Spirit provides certain trained leaders to help recognize those gifts, develop them, and teach the people how to draw on the power within them (the Holy Spirit) to employ their gifts effectively. These leaders are to help each Christian enjoy to the utmost the excitement and pleasure of doing what no one else can do in the body of Christ today.

Briefly, this is essentially a process of incarnation. When God chose to visit this earth to set before us the new kind of life he was offering to men, he did so by incarnating his life in a body. God became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus Christ was the incarnation of God – God in human flesh appearing among men. But that was only the beginning of the process of incarnation. We make a great mistake if we think incarnation ended with the earthly life of Jesus. The incarnation is still going on. Open the book of Acts, and read the opening words, and you will find that the writer of it, Dr. Luke, says that he has set down in the Gospel record "all the things that Jesus began to say and to do," {cf, Acts 1:1b RSV}. In Acts he continues that record so the church is nothing more or less

than the extension of the life of Jesus into the world even to the 20th century. It isn't the church that does the work alone. No, it is Jesus, still working through his body, which is the church.

Now that is an all important concept. What happened on a small scale in Judea and Galilee 1900 years ago is intended to happen on a large scale throughout the whole world today, permeating every level of society and every aspect of human life. As Christians today discover this to be a live possibility, life becomes gripping, exciting, the most revolutionary thing that could possibly be experienced. It is then the world becomes aware that God is not dead but very much alive.

Now, we must take time to look more closely at the special gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to his people. We must begin here, for everything will find its ultimate focus at this point. You have a gift. It doesn't make any difference whether you are a young Christian or an old Christian, whether you are a new Christian or a mature Christian. If you are a Christian at all, if you have come to know Jesus Christ as your Lord, if you have received the gift of the Holy Spirit by faith in Jesus Christ, and have passed out of the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ, moved from darkness into light, from death into life, then you have also received a gift of the Holy Spirit. That gift may be lying dormant in you, inchoate, unformed. You may not even know what yet it is, but it is there, for God has said that without exception all Christians are given a gift or gifts for their ministry. But that is not the whole story. You must learn how to fulfill that gift in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in the power of the flesh.

There are only two forces by which human life can be lived. One is what the Bible calls, *the flesh* – the self life. Each of us started life on that basis and have been living by it up to the point we became Christians and much of the time long after that. That is the basis on which the world lives. There is also the power of the new life in Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit. That is quite a different thing. It manifests itself in wholly different ways – in giving oneself instead of wanting to center everything in self. We need to learn that we can exercise our gifts, even though they be spiritual gifts, in either the power of *the flesh* or the power of *the Spirit*.

A gift exercised in the power of the flesh is a deadly thing. Perhaps you have heard preachers

preaching in the flesh – exercising the gift of preaching but doing so out of a self-centered desire for exaltation, for self-advancement, for praise or whatever. That preaching always has a ring of falseness about it. It may attract temporarily, but it ultimately produces death. Nothing is more tragic than a spiritual gift exercised in the power of the flesh. Therefore, nothing is more necessary than to learn how to take these gifts and use them in the power of the Holy Spirit.

But that is not easily learned. Here is where we need help. We need the help of the Scriptures in order that we might see what the flesh is, and who the Holy Spirit is, and how he operates in life. We need the apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastor-teachers, as well. We need to be planed and sandpapered and smoothed. God has several grades of sandpaper, running from extremely fine to extremely rough! We need to be honed and sharpened. We need to have the corners rounded off. We need a new outlook on old circumstances. We need new power with which to meet old problems. We need to be pushed out of the nest at times, and other times helped back in.

The place to start in this is the place where Paul begins in Ephesians 4. He says, "But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift," {Eph 4:7 RSV}. Let us start with these gifts. The great passage on the gifts of the Spirit is First Corinthians 12. I would like to turn to that passage and go through these gifts with you.

The chapter falls into three divisions, beginning with Verse 4:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. {1 Cor 12:4-6 RSV}

Notice the three divisions of this subject. There are gifts, ministries (what is called "service" here), and there are workings. Gifts are linked with the Spirit; ministries are linked with the Lord Jesus; and workings or power is linked with God the Father.

A *gift*, as we have seen already, is a specific function to be performed.

A *ministry* is the area in which a gift is performed or the group among which it is performed. It is where the gift is utilized. It is the Lord Jesus'

prerogative to determine that. He puts some to the task of speaking to Christians, others he sends to minister to the worldly. To some he gives the job of teaching youth; some minister to older people. Some to children. To some he gives the job of speaking to women. Others to men. Some go to the Jews, others to the Gentiles. Remember in Galatians when Peter and Paul met together it was recognized that both had the gift of preaching, but Peter was to go to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. They had the same gift but their ministry was different.

Then there are workings. A *working* is the power by which a gift is manifested or ministered. There are varieties of working, the apostle says, but it is the same God that inspires them all in every one. "Varieties of working," refers to the different manifestation of the power of God in any one ministry. Every time a Christian preaches or teaches or helps someone, it does not have the same results. The same sermon preached in several different circumstances will not always produce the same results. What is the difference? It is God's choice. He does not intend to produce the same results every time. He could but he doesn't always desire to. There are varieties of power and it is up to God to determine how much is accomplished by each ministry.

It is recorded in the Scriptures that John the Baptist did no miracles all his life, yet he was a prophet of God – a mighty prophet of whom Jesus said, "No man born of woman is greater than he," {cf, Matt 11:11, Luke 7:28}. Then why didn't he work miracles? There are those today who tell us that if we cannot do miracles, it is a sign we are not very proficient in manifesting the power of God. We are only beginners. But John did no miracles. Why not? Because there are varieties of working. It was not the choice of God to work through John in that way.

Now we come to the list of specific gifts. I shall run through these rapidly, but I hope helpfully.

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, {1 Cor 12:8 RSV}.

Here is a pair of gifts, the gifts of *wisdom* and of *knowledge*. The gift of **wisdom** is direct insight

into truth. It doesn't make any difference what kind of truth it is. It may be spiritual truth, scriptural truth, or it may be secular truth, but to some is given the gift of insight into the truth and the ability to apply that insight to a specific situation. What a wonderful gift this is. Such are men and women who know what to do, and how to do it, in any given circumstance. Let a group get into trouble and it soon appears who has this gift among them. Let Christians become puzzled, bewildered, and they always turn instinctively to the one among them who has the gift of wisdom. Those with this gift ought to be elected to boards, they make excellent counselors.

Linked with this is the gift of **knowledge**. These two often appear in the same individual. Not always, but often. Knowledge is the ability to investigate and systematize facts. It is the ability to pick out the important facts in any investigation and to put them in manageable order. This sort of person is able to recognize key and important facts as a result of investigation. That is different from the gift of wisdom. Wisdom is direct insight into the meaning of facts. This is the ability to gather facts, the gift of knowledge. These people make wonderful exegetes of the Scriptures. They are thoughtful teachers, and this gift often accompanies the gift of teaching. They are wonderful to have on committees, and if you can get one as chairman, it is all the better.

Then the gift of **faith** is mentioned. As I said in an earlier message, this is essentially what we call "vision." It is the ability to see something that needs to be done, and to believe that God will do it, even though it looks impossible. Trusting that sense of faith, this person moves out and accomplishes the thing in God's name. Every great Christian enterprise has been begun by someone who possesses the gift of faith.

In Formosa a number of years ago, I met a remarkable woman. Some of you know of Lillian Dickson's work. Here is a woman who clearly and unmistakably has the gift of faith. When she sees a need she moves right in to meet it. I recently received a paper from her and learned she is concerned about the little lads on the streets of Formosa who have no homes. They are orphans, or have been cast adrift by their families. She was keenly aware of the pressures that force these boys to get involved in wrong things, to be pushed into a life of crime or immorality. Her heart went out to

them, but because she has the gift of faith she doesn't just feel for them, she does something about it. She has moved in and started an organization to rescue these boys. All over the world people send her money for her projects, sometimes without her knowing them at all. It is obvious she has the gift of faith. Every great Christian organization has begun this way. Someone has a vision for what God can do and through the years carries it through. Others may help in accomplishing it, though they do not have the same vision themselves.

Then the apostle mentions "gifts of **healing**." This is clearly the supernatural ability to make sick people well. Occasionally, in the record of church history, there have been some who had the gift of healing, but it is a rare gift today, infrequently bestowed. I have never personally met anyone who had the gift of healing. It is certain that none of these so-called faith healers of our day has this gift. An investigation of their ministry would make that crystal clear. They do not have the ability to lay hands on people and make them well, in spite of their pretentious claims to that effect. They are quick to record the instances when someone is seemingly helped, but they never record the thousands that are turned away without help, to whom nothing happens. To have the gift of healing is to be able to lay hands on the sick and they become well.

You ask, "Why is this so infrequently given today?" The answer is in Verse 11: "All these are inspired by the one and same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills." This gift is not given because it is not the will of the Spirit for it to be given in these days as widely as it was in the early church.

Along this same line is the gift of **miracles**. This is the ability to accomplish natural things in a supernatural way, to short-circuit the processes of nature, as our Lord did when he turned water into wine, or multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed the five thousand. Some may still have this gift today. It may be given. I do not doubt that it can be given. But again I have never met anyone who has the gift of miracles, though perhaps some in church history have had this gift.

When these spectacular gifts, (healings, miracles, tongues and so forth), are exercised, it is invariably the sign of an immature church. Gifts like these are only for the initial building up of faith, as

a bridge to move Christians from dependence upon things that they see happening to faith in a God who can work and accomplish things when they don't see them happening. This is what God wants. We are to walk by faith, not by sight.

The gift of **prophecy** comes next. This is one of the greatest gifts of all. Chapter 14 of First Corinthians is given over to the praise of this gift, and the apostle urges the church to value this gift and to seek it. Verse 3 of Chapter 14 says,

On the other hand, he who prophesies speaks to men for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. {1 Cor 14:3 RSV}

That is the gift of prophecy. When a man has this gift, his words have power to build, by stimulating and encouraging others. This is not a gift only for preachers. All these gifts are for any in the church, preachers and laymen alike. Many laymen have the gift of prophecy.

Have you ever been in a meeting where a problem was being discussed and there is a seeming impasse – no one seems to know what the answer is. There is a sense of discouragement because you can't seem to get anywhere. Then someone will stand up and speak, and, as he speaks, everyone knows that what he is saying is exactly the answer. That is the gift of prophecy being exercised – the ability to speak with power, to build by stimulating and encouraging. What a wonderful gift this is. The church could never get on without the exercise of this gift.

Then there is the gift of **discernment of spirits**. It is the ability to distinguish between "the spirit of error and the spirit of truth," {cf, 1 Jn 4:6}. This is a gift I often wish I had. I'm glad my wife has it. It is the ability to see through a phony before his error is manifest to everyone by its ultimate results. When Ananias and Sapphira came bringing an offering of their land and put it before Peter, he exercised the gift of discernment when he said, "Who taught you to lie to the Holy Ghost?" {cf, Acts 5:3 KJV}. He knew this whole thing was a lie. This is the ability to read a book and sense the subtlety of error in it. It is a valuable gift, to be exercised both in the church and in the world.

Then there is another pair of gifts, the gift of **various kinds of tongues** and the **interpretation of tongues**. What is this? This is the ability to praise

God in a language that was never learned and also to interpret a language that was never learned. This gift is never for the purposes of preaching the gospel. In the Scriptures it is always and clearly for the purpose of praising God. It is not for private use, for we read that all the gifts of the Spirit are given “for the common good” {1 Cor 12:7 RSV}, and are not to be exercised in private. However, it is useless in church without interpretation. There are many modern claims that this gift is being revived. But the question that always needs to be asked in investigating these claims is whether the manifestation being exercised is the same as the gift of tongues in the New Testament. The gift of tongues was a definitely known language and it had a specific purpose in the early church. It marked the fact that God was judging the nation Israel and turning from them to the Gentiles. Therefore, it is very unlikely, it seems to me, that the gift of tongues would be manifested today. Certainly it is the easiest gift to imitate. Because of this, imitations abound on every hand. Whether they are the true gift or not can only be determined by careful comparison with the Scriptures.

At the close of this chapter, in Verses 28-31, there is another list of the gifts, some of them duplicating gifts in the first list.

And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. {1 Cor 12:28 RSV}

I wish to reserve the consideration of **apostles, prophets** and **teachers** till a later message because these belong to a special class. We have already looked at the gift of miracles and the gift of healing. But here is a wonderful gift that is mentioned for the first time: the gift of **helps**. This is perhaps the greatest gift of all, and it is the most widespread. This is the gift of lending a hand whenever a need appears. In church, it is often manifest in those who serve as ushers and treasurers, those who prepare the Lord’s table, or arrange the flowers and serve the dinners. In the world, it is manifest in those who help the weak, read to the blind, nurse the sick, and in any way minister to someone. This is the ministry of a definite gift of the Spirit. In Romans 12 it is called the gift of showing **mercy**.

That is a wonderful title for it. The church could never operate without this gift of helps.

Then there is the gift of **administration**, those who organize and execute. These are the men to be elected to church boards and head programs. They know how to organize and direct, in the Spirit.

In Romans 12 there is the mention of two other gifts beside those mentioned here, the gift of **teaching** (of which we will say more later), and the gift of **contributing**. The latter is the gift of making money and supporting Christian work by such gifts. Not only the wealthy have this gift. Some who are very poor also have the gift of making contributions.

I think of a dear lady in New York City who worked as a scrubwoman in the skyscrapers of New York for many years, earning money to send out young men into the mission field. In the course of her lifetime she sent out over thirty young people into the mission field. She had the gift of contributions, and she exercised it.

The range of these gifts is absolutely tremendous. They are not only for use in the church. They are for out in the world as well.

- Some of you who have the gift of teaching ought to be exercising it in your home.
- Some of you who have the gift of helps ought to be exercising it in your office or shop or wherever you are.
- Some have the gift of wisdom and you ought to be exercising it wherever you touch people.
- Likewise the gifts of knowledge and administration.

All these gifts are intended for all of life. As Christians exercise their gifts in the power of the Holy Spirit, the world will realize that God is not dead.

I would like to urge you to seek and find, before the face of God, the gift that you have, and begin this month to put it into operation.

Will you seek the mind and will of God as to how your gift can be manifested?

Remember the words of the apostle to Timothy, “Stir up the gift that is in you, which was given unto you,” {cf, 2 Tim 1:6}. Only by that means

will the church come alive with a vitality it has never had before.

If you say “No!” to this call, then you will discover what the Lord Jesus meant when he said, “He who saves his life shall lose it, but he who loses it for my sake and the gospel, will save it,” {cf, Mark 8:35}.

Prayer:

Our Father, we thank you for this look together at these gifts. Strengthen us as we minister in thy name with the gifts thou hast given to us. Teach us Lord to be spiritually alive in the midst of the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Contemporary Christ

by Ray C. Stedman

In our studies of Ephesians 4, we have learned that the church is not to be a pressure group to influence legislatures, or some kind of religious club intended to comfort and assuage the feelings of people in trouble. The unique character of the church is that it is the body of Christ. Its calling, therefore, is to declare and demonstrate the life that inhabits it. That is the life of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church is a body whose purpose is to demonstrate and to declare the power of Christ in today's world.

The pattern of that function, as we have already seen, is that each unit of the body is to develop and exercise a distinct, divinely given gift or gifts. These gifts can be exercised in either of two directions – toward the world (life as we live it Monday through Saturday) – or toward the church (among the people of God, Sunday through Saturday). Now, to enable this work to go on smoothly and effectively, the mind of God has ordained a special support ministry consisting of four gifts. These are referred to in Verse 11,

... some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers [or, teaching pastors], {Eph 4:11 RSV}

As we focus on the details of these gifts with a view to understanding what this equipment is with which Christ has endowed his body, we must not lose sight of the supreme reason for the manifestation of these gifts. It is in order that the world might see Jesus Christ at work. It needs to come to grips with him, but it was never intended that the world should come to church to find him. The church should be in the world. It is only thus that the world will understand that Christ is not dead, is

not gone, and is not inactive. He is not off in some remote place far from the affairs of this world (heaven), and religious people are not trying to struggle on and do the best they can until he comes back again. This is never the divine intent. This is not the New Testament pattern. Christ is alive and has been at work in human society for twenty centuries.

Someone says, "Where? I don't see him. What's he doing? Where do you see Jesus Christ at work in our society today? What kind of work is he doing?" The answer is, "He is doing exactly what he did in the days of his flesh." The only difference is that he is no longer doing it through one solitary, earthly, physical body. He is doing it now through a corporate, complex body which exists around the world and permeates and penetrates every level of society. But it is the same exact ministry – to the same race, under the same conditions, facing the same attitudes and the same problems as when he was here in the flesh. Now he does it through a different kind of body. We need badly to understand that concept, for that is the church.

Now what is this ministry, specifically? What is Christ doing through his body today? Let us hear the answer from his own lips. One of the most dramatic scenes recorded in the New Testament is found in the fourth chapter of Luke's Gospel. Beginning in Verse 16, Luke says,

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the

prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” {Luke 4:16-21 RSV}

This is an account of our Lord’s return to his home town of Nazareth. He has been in Jerusalem, and Judea, and the cities around the lake of Galilee, with his headquarters in Capernaum. He has already gained a reputation throughout the land as a doer of good deeds and a worker of miracles. His fame has preceded him to his home town. Word has come back to Nazareth of the strange things this local boy was doing. They had heard much of his astonishing miracles. Now he has come home and they all know he will be in the synagogue on the sabbath. The whole town is out to hear him and they are anxiously hoping that he will do among them some of the miracles he has done in other cities. In the synagogue he calls for the book of Isaiah, turns deliberately to a passage in the 61st chapter predicting the miracles of the Messiah, reads it, closes the book, and says to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The townspeople were aghast. They said to themselves, “What does he mean? He hasn’t done anything yet. How does he mean this has been fulfilled? here are the miracles?”

Knowing this thought was in their hearts, he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself’; what we have heard you did at Capernaum, do this also here in your own country,” {Luke 4:23 RSV}. Then he reminded them that, in the history of Israel, it was often true that when a prophet came back to his own country his people would not receive him. He reminds them of two clear examples of this, Elijah and Elisha. Why does he make this point when he does no miracles among them? He is attempting to

point out to them that the physical fulfillment of these predictions (of opening the eyes of the blind and healing of the lame, etc.) is not the sole intent of the Scriptures. Messiah merely begins on that level to capture attention and evoke trust, but he desires to help them to see that he has fulfilled his ministry only when he has reached the spirit and soul of man. It is this healing of the spirit of man which he is after.

These hometown people had their expectations set on the physical alone. They wanted to see miracles. They refused to accept his intimation that the ultimate goal is the soul and spirit. That was continually the mistake of the Jews during our Lord’s ministry. The apostle tells us it was still a problem after the crucifixion. “The Jews,” he said, “seek after a sign,” {cf, 1 Cor 1:22}. Throughout our Lord’s ministry they continually hounded him for a sign. They wanted to see physical miracles and cared nothing for the deeper miracle of the healing of a soul. Someone has well pointed out that the miracles are also really parables. They are designed to teach us on the physical level what Christ is offering to do on the deeper level of the spirit. Those who hunger and thirst for physical miracles today are repeating this error of Israel. They are forever wanting to see something visible, something thrilling, something supernatural! – as if a work done in the interior of a man’s life is not as equally supernatural as something done to the outside. But our Lord points out to these folk at Nazareth that the predicted ministry has already been fulfilled in their midst by his presence among them. It finds its complete fulfillment when the things predicted occur in the spirit of an individual.

Now, read through again this quotation which describes the ministry of Christ as it was predicted by the prophet 725 years before our Lord was born. But read it, not as his ministry then, but as your ministry now – as what Jesus Christ intends to do and will do through you as a Christian in the middle of the 20th century. After all, remember what he said in John 14, “The works that I do, you shall do also, and greater works than these shall you do,” {cf, John 14:12a}. Greater in what way? Well, anything done in the realm of the spirit is greater than that done in the body. “Greater works than these shall you do, because I go to the Father,” {cf, John 14:12b RSV}. In other verses he shows us that his going to the Father results in the sending of the Spirit, and, through the ministry of the Holy

Spirit, there will be performed by the church throughout the ages far greater works than he did in the flesh, for they are works done in the very center of humanity, the spirit.

Look then at the passage again. There are five divisions of this ministry:

It begins with the phrase,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” {Luke 4:18a RSV}

Here then is a description of a Spirit-filled ministry. We hear much about the need for Spirit-filled lives today. Well, how do you know when the Spirit of God is at work in a life? Is it by some strange phenomenon that takes place? Is it by a miraculous manifestation that occurs? No, the Spirit-filled ministry will be this kind of a ministry described here. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me” – that is the first thing.

What will the Spirit do? First, evangelize!

“... he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.” {Luke 4:18b RSV}

That is the first task, the simple declaring of God’s actions among men. That’s evangelism. The good news is that God has not left the human race to struggle on in frustration, bewilderment, boredom, helplessness, and hopelessness. God has done something. God has entered the race, God has acted, God has gone to the cross, God has delivered mankind. God has acted, not merely spoken. He has done something. Those actions stand as unchangeable facts of history. To tell the story of them is to preach the good news.

To whom? Well, not to the rich, but to the poor. What does he mean? Does he mean only those poverty-stricken in material things? Are not the rich and wealthy to hear this? Obviously his meaning goes beyond the physical again. Remember the first words in the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest message ever delivered in the hearing of men? It begins with that remarkable recipe for happiness, the Beatitudes. “Blessed (happy) is the man, etc.” Our Lord begins with the poor. “Happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God,” {cf, Matt 5:3}. Happy is the man who doesn’t have anything and knows it. Happy is the man who does not have any standing before God, does not have a long record of good deeds to rest upon and create a self-righteous attitude but

blessed is the man who comes before God and says, “I have nothing.” God is able then to give him the kingdom of God. That is why the gospel is to be preached to the poor in spirit.

Don’t waste your time talking to people who think they have everything they need. Look for those who have nothing. But don’t be misled by the fact that some pretend for awhile to have everything yet underneath there is a very hungry heart. Get down to that. Don’t waste your time with people who really feel they have everything. Talk to those who know they don’t.

Then look at the second thing, consisting of two factors.

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind,” {Luke 4:18c RSV}

Release and recovery. Liberty and light. Tell me, are there people who are captives today? Are there people who are blind today? Are there men and women bound by attitudes that hold them in captivity? No matter how they struggle against them they find themselves returning to the same unhappy outlook, the same poisonous, hate-filled, jealous, bitter expression. Are they captives? You meet them every week and so do I. Are there people who are blind? Are there men and women who think they are doing the right thing, perfectly sincere, honest people, who hope they are doing right and are trying to struggle through the best they can, but every time they turn around they discover that they have been doing wrong and they end up stumbling blindly from one episode to another, deeper and deeper into difficulty? Are not these people blind? Then they need this ministry of proclaiming release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind.

This is the ministry of teaching.

Remember that Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free,” {cf, John 8:32}. What sets people free? Telling them the truth, not telling them what they want to hear, but telling them what they need to hear. That is what sets people free.

What opens the eyes of the blind? Jesus said, “If any man follow me, he shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life,” {cf, John 8:12}. That is the ministry of discipling – getting people to follow, and obey, Jesus Christ. Not

merely to come and sing about him. Not simply to come into church and recite the creed or say the right things, but to actually obey him, even when every fiber in their being is crying out to disobey him. “If any man follow me, he shall not walk in darkness.” He’ll know where he is going. He’ll know how to get there. He’ll know whether what he is doing is right or wrong. “He shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.” “If you walk in the light, as he is in the light, you have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s son, cleanses you from all sin,” {cf, 1 Jn 1:7}.

Obviously, this ministry is not something religious. It takes in all of life. It touches what we are doing every day of our lives. It involves us at our work, and in our home, and at school and shop and play, when we are awake and when we are asleep and in everything we do. This is the ministry that is committed to us.

Look at the next one:

**“to set at liberty those who are oppressed,”
{Luke 4:18d RSV}**

This is the ministry of healing, of counseling. Are there oppressed people today? Are there those under a burden of oppression, a weight in their lives which they can’t escape?

This last week a man drove 300 miles one way, 600 miles round trip, to tell me of a burden that was oppressing him. For over a year he had been crushed by an attitude of hate toward a man who had done him an injustice. He couldn’t get rid of it. He couldn’t eat and he couldn’t sleep. On two or three occasions he had barely stopped himself at the critical moment from committing murder. He came to talk about it, and as we talked I told him the truth. I proclaimed to him liberty for those who are oppressed. He acted upon it and a miracle was performed right before my eyes. I saw a man healed. I saw a burden lifted. I saw the poison of hate drain out of that man’s heart and the love of Jesus Christ come flooding in again. His whole attitude visibly changed. He went back home with a different look on his face and a different feeling in his heart – delivered, set free.

Now it didn’t take a pastor to do it, least of all me. Any Christian could have done it. He didn’t have to drive 600 miles to find someone to set him free. Or he shouldn’t have had to. Any Christian

who knew his Bible could have set him free, for this is the universal ministry of the gospel. This is part of the ministry that is committed to every person who is in the body of Christ – to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

The last one is:

**“to proclaim the acceptable year of the
Lord.” {Luke 4:19 RSV}**

That is one of the most remarkable statements of the Bible. If you look up the original passage in Isaiah from which our Lord is quoting you will discover that, in the original, there is a comma at this place. The sentence is not complete. In the original, it goes on to say, “and to declare the day of vengeance of our God;” {cf, Isa 61:2}. The Lord Jesus did not read the rest of that sentence. He closed the book at the comma and handed it back, saying, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” {cf, Luke 4:21b}. Thereby he implied that some of it is not yet fulfilled. There is a part that awaits the return of Christ. That will introduce the day of vengeance. But now is the acceptable time; today is the day of salvation.

There is nothing that people need to hear more than that. That is to explain what is happening to our world. That is to relieve the cold grip of fear that clutches at the hearts of thousands who get up every morning scared to death, not knowing what is happening in the world. They are afraid that it is out of control. They fear that God has lost control, if he ever had it. They need someone to proclaim to them the acceptable year of our Lord – the fact that God knows what he is doing, and, in our day and age, is permitting the gospel to go out and restraining the forces of evil. He will let them go only so far and then he puts a halt to them. He will let certain manifestations of evil occur and not others, in order that men might be able to hear this good news.

That is the whole explanation for some of the remarkable things that take place today as in Indonesia, where the Communists were all set to take over the government, but suddenly there is a strange, unexpected, totally unanticipated revolt, and, instead those who are opposed to Communism come in. Why did this happen? Because God is at work in human history and is restraining evil forces and permitting them to go only so far. He is running the world according to his timetable, and to-

day is the acceptable year of the Lord. It will go on until God's timetable comes to an end. We can set people's heart at rest by proclaiming this.

Are there fearful people today?

I don't know anything that is more widespread than fear. This is what is behind so much of the student unrest of our day and the rebellion that is present in the student world. This rebellion is a protest against fear, a fear so disembodied that it creates a sense of frustration because no one can get hold of it. It drives young people to do something desperate, to protest, to strike out, to defy these silent, invisible forces that threaten them on every side. You can't understand the student mind unless you understand that. They are desperately in need of someone to tell them about the acceptable year of the Lord.

Is this a relevant ministry? Is this something the world really needs? Or is it so much empty mouthing, so much theological twaddle? Is this something people are dying for, desperate and hungry for? I will leave it with you to answer. But if you see it as I do, you will know this is the greatest thing anyone can get involved in. This is the most exciting ministry that you could possibly have today. Take this list:

- Evangelizing,
- Teaching,
- Counseling,
- Explaining the times.

Note that you can fulfill this in either one of two directions. You can minister to the world or to the church, and both are desperately in need in this hour.

Perhaps someone says, "I can understand how you can evangelize the world, but surely you don't need to evangelize the church." There is nothing that needs it quite so badly! There are thousands, millions in church who need evangelizing. Even if they do have some glimpse of the truth, they only "see men as trees walking." Remember that blind man whom Jesus healed? At his first touch he saw "men as trees walking." He couldn't quite see them plainly, and our Lord touched him again and opened his eyes, {see Mark 8:23-25}. That is the picture of the man in church who needs evangelizing.

There are those in the world who need teaching. There are also those in the church who need

teaching, who need truth unfolded to them so that it is something vital. Not something they are trying to study in Sunday School class as a kind of option to life, but something which is the explanation for what is going on in their life.

There are those who need healing, both in the world and in church.

There are those who need the times explained to them, both in the world and in church.

Someone says, "When can one do this? After all, I have to earn a living. I don't have time to go around doing this kind of thing." There is an easy answer to that. Do it at work. Do it in your home. This is something that ought to be as natural and normal a part of life as anything else you do. Obviously the great majority of Christians spend most of their time doing the work of the world, and this is only right. It is as it should be. Not everyone is called to be a pastor or a preacher or an evangelist or even a teacher. The major preoccupation of any man's life is his daily employment. But, if Jesus Christ has no part in that major occupation of your life, then he is Lord only of the margins, the spare time, the leftovers!

Did you ever notice that the important figures of the Bible are not the monks and priests? They are shepherds and fishermen and tax gatherers and soldiers and politicians and tentmakers and physicians and carpenters. These are the ones who occupy the center of the stage. You can tell the good news about God's actions among men at a water cooler in an office or over a sandwich at lunch. You can heal a hurting heart in a car while you are driving home. You can teach the truth that frees and enlightens anywhere.

A Christian man told me this week that he is a member of an urban renewal committee in San Francisco, responsible for clearing up some of the slum areas of that city. In a meeting with this board, they were contemplating setting up a new housing project. They were facing the question of what to do with the people who were already there, living in tenements and flats. There was the feeling of, "That's their problem, let them take care of it." But this man spoke up and said, "No, it is not their problem. It is ours. We have no right to put in a housing project unless we face the responsibility of helping these people to find some other place to live. Christian compassion can do nothing less than that." He insisted on that, and, because he spoke up at the critical moment, he made the

committee face it. They did face it and are moving to meet the problem, and their lives are more free because of it.

You can quiet the fearful with a discussion of the times anywhere. All you need is a newspaper or a headline that calls attention to what is happening in the world, and immediately you have wonderful ground to bring up what God is doing in human society, and to break through with the good news.

We must never forget our Lord's story of the sheep and the goats, the judgment of believers. What is the point of the story? It is that we cannot evade activity. We must put our gifts to work. The Lord Jesus has given us a gift to be put to work. We dare not hide it in the ground as that unfaithful steward did in our Lords' parable, for we must meet him one day for an accounting. The question from his lips will be, "What did you do with the gift that was given you in the body of Christ?"

I am trying to face us with the seriousness of this. This is not an option. It is not something we can put aside or come back to at some later hour.

This is something that God himself has given us which we must come to grips with and about which we must be very, very serious. What gift do I have? Where am I exercising it? What am I doing about this? These are the questions that we need to face.

Our faith means nothing if it doesn't bring us to this place.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for these words that remind us you have not forgotten about this world of ours but are at work in it doing the same wonderful things that you did before. What an exciting thing to have a part in this. What a foolish thing that we should withhold ourselves from this ministry and busy ourselves thinking only about our problems and our life, our talent and our abilities when we have the call to invest ourselves in this kind of a program. Teach us to do thy will. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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and Maintenance Service
By: Ray C. Stedman
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The Church's Building and Maintenance Service

by Ray C. Stedman

Our subject is the building and maintenance service of the church. If you are a bit surprised by that title, let me reassure you: We shall not be talking about the janitorial service. The odd title is an attempt to focus your attention on the words of Ephesians 4, Verse 11, which mark the divine program for coordinating, developing and articulating the gifts and activities of the members of the body of Christ to make it an effective instrument in human society. The church can never be any more than a rather pious, harmless group of religious people until it returns to this divine program and becomes what God intended it to be. When it does, it will become a disturbing element in society, a revolutionary ferment that will make the most powerful impact that can be made upon any community.

In Verse 11, the Apostle Paul says concerning Jesus Christ,

... his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipment of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ. {Eph 4:11-12 RSV}

We have seen that Paul uses two great figures for the church in this letter to the Ephesians. First, he likens it to a body, a human body of flesh and bones, articulated and coordinated, made up of many members. He also likens it to a building, which has been growing through the centuries, as a habitation for God. At times he seems to mix his metaphors together. He talks about a building growing, but buildings don't grow – bodies do. But he is so anxious to make this truth clear that his language becomes a bit mixed. Perhaps he does it deliberately in order that we might capture the thought of something living, a living body, a living

building. We sometimes mix metaphors like that, like saying, "You buttered your bread, now lie in it." Or, "You've made your bed, now eat it."

We have seen that you don't become a member of the body of Christ by joining a church. You become a member by being born again by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way into this body. Once in, every member has a contribution to make, and, as each member works at what God has given him or her to do, the whole body functions. When Paul describes it as a building, he makes clear it is a living, growing building. Every Christian is a stone added to that building, a living stone, as Peter says in his letter. Each is a vital part in the great temple the Holy Spirit is building as a habitation of God.

We can never understand the church unless we understand that truth. The church is where God dwells, where he is at work today. That is why many people, seeking to discover God in the universe, say he is dead. The trouble is, they do not have his address; they don't know where he lives. But he is very much at work through his body, the building made for him by the Holy Spirit. If we think of the church as a body, then, in this passage in Ephesians 4, we are studying the physiology of that body – how the organs operate, how the body works together, how it is coordinated to do one single thing. If we think of the church as a building, then we are studying the blueprints, the architecture of it, the plan of the designer.

But whether the church is regarded as a body or a building, there are four functions within it which are so universally needed and so mutually shared that we must consider them independently from the other gifts that Christ gives to his people. These four functions are called here, "apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers." These gifts constitute what we usually call *the ministry*,

or more horribly, *the clergy*. Both terms, of course, are wrong. The whole church is in the *ministry*, as you can see from this very verse. These four functions exist for the equipping of the saints “unto the work of the ministry,” therefore, every Christian is in the ministry. This has nothing to do with full-time, part-time or any other relationship to time. We are all called to the work of the ministry, and, therefore, it is improper to designate this group as the ministry, although it is commonly done. It is even worse to call them *the clergy*, for that word comes from the Latin *clericus*, which means “a priest.” Again, every believer is to be a priest in the church of Jesus Christ. Some scholars feel the term derives ultimately from the Greek word, “to be heir,” as if the clergy had some special privilege in the body of Christ that no one else had. But this is a total misunderstanding of the Scriptures. The clergy are no better than anyone else in the body of Christ; they are ordinary Christians with a specialized task, that’s all. They have no greater privileges and no greater authority, as individuals within the body of Christ, than any other Christians. In fact, they do not exist as a separate group. These four functions cannot properly classify themselves as a particular group different from the rest of Christians.

The newspapers recently carried the suggestion of a minister, or clergyman, that a union be formed of clergymen. That is a far cry from the New Testament. There is no place for a union of clergymen within the New Testament. They do not exist as a group but as individuals, gifted and placed within the body, to perform a particular function that is necessary for its growth and life and movement.

In a previous message, I suggested that these four functions correspond rather roughly to the systems of our physical body:

1. There is, first, the structural system of the body – the bones and the muscle forming a skeleton that makes it possible for us to move and walk and act. This corresponds to the apostles and their function in the body of Christ. They lay the foundation. They build the basic structure that makes the body of Christ take a particular form.
2. Then there is the nervous system in our bodies – that which galvanizes, which stimulates, which makes us alert and active. If it becomes

overactive we become nervously indisposed. We can easily recognize the importance of the nervous system to the body. It corresponds to the work of the prophets in the body of Christ. They are to set truth before us so as to galvanize, electrify, stimulate, and motivate the body of Christ.

3. Then there is the digestive system which corresponds to the evangelist who makes possible growth in the spiritual body. The digestive system takes food which is quite unlike flesh and transforms it into flesh making it a living part of the body.
4. Then there is the circulatory system, the blood, which feeds and cleanses our bodies continually. You can see that this corresponds to the teaching-pastors who labor in the body of Christ to feed it and to cleanse it and to keep it working properly.

The Lord has carefully designed the human body so that every Christian carries about with him a visual aid to understanding the nature of the church. You have a body and your body is a picture of the church of Jesus Christ.

Now perhaps it would be instructive to view this same thing from the standpoint of the other figure Paul uses – the church as a building. The apostle clearly refers to the first two functions (apostles and prophets) in terms of the figure of a building.

In Chapter 2, Verses 19-20, he says,

So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. {Eph 2:19-22 RSV}

There is the building and the individual Christians as members, stones, within that building. The apostle says the apostles and prophets are given the job of laying the foundation. Theirs is a foundational ministry of widespread effect, whether we

think of the original apostles or contemporary ones. The apostolic gift is still being given today, but it functions in a somewhat secondary sense compared to that of the original apostles.

In the figure of a building, the time sequence is stressed in this particular illustration. Paul gives it again in First Corinthians 12,

And God has appointed in the church first apostles [That does not mean first in rank. It means first in historical sequence. First, apostles;], **second prophets, third teachers,** ... {1 Cor 12:28a RSV}

That is the order in which these gifts were introduced into the church. Here we understand that Jesus Christ, as Lord of the church, has given the right to lay the foundations to the apostles and prophets. Now this is supremely important.

Any of you men in construction business knows that a foundation is of the utmost importance. You do not take risks or chances with a foundation. You lay it squarely, securely and strongly, for the whole building is going to rest on that foundation and will derive its strength from the solidarity of that foundation. The same thing is true in the church. The Lord Jesus made very clear that if a man builds on the wrong foundation he is in trouble. One man builds his house on the sand. The house may look very beautiful, may be impressive, outstanding, but when the storms come, it falls. Another builds on the rock, and his house will stand, {cf, Matt 7:24-27}. It is the foundation which makes all the difference.

It was the task then of the **apostles** and prophets to lay the foundation of the church. We have the record in the Gospels that our Lord called twelve men to be with him (that was their primary characteristic) and to send them out in specialized ministry. He is the one who named them *apostles*. The word means "to send out," or "one sent forth." That is an apostle. The twelve apostles were sent out by the Lord Jesus with a special commission and a special authority. As you follow their ministry you recognize they possessed an authoritative word. Wherever they went they spoke with authority. They were impressed with this themselves. They came back to the Lord and told how they rejoiced when they discovered that the demons were subject to them. When they spoke their word had authority. That authority is the special mark of

an apostle. Later on there were other apostles. Paul came after the twelve and never belonged to the original twelve. He did not take part in their particular ministry, though he was truly an apostle. He was sent to be the apostle to the Gentiles. So were Barnabas, Silas, Timothy and Titus. These also shared in the apostolic ministry.

The work of an apostle was to declare the whole body of truth concerning Jesus Christ. That is the foundation. How do you get into the church? You get in by believing the truth. The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is the difference between a believer and a non-believer. If you are a believer in the truth about Jesus Christ (which surely means more than intellectual assent but commitment of the will as well) you are in the church. You are on the foundation. What is that foundation? It is what you believe about Jesus Christ; and the apostles laid that foundation. It is apostolic truth. We find this foundation in the New Testament. "Other foundation can no man lay," Paul said, "than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ," {cf, 1 Cor 3:11 KJV}. What the apostles say about Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, and what they said about Jesus Christ is recorded for us in our New Testament. This is from the hands of the apostles and the whole church rests squarely upon that foundation. If it does not rest there, it is a very rickety, uncertain structure indeed.

Today many are straying from the foundation and as a result they have lost any note of authority or assurance. It is only as the church rests upon this foundation of the faith taught by the apostles that there is any certainty or strength. Human viewpoints or opinions make no difference, what modern knowledge says, or what discoveries science opens to us do not change the foundation. It was laid once and for all, long ago, and it is on this that the church builds. What we are concerned about is what apostles taught. That is the great and ultimate truth, the "truth as it is in Jesus."

Some time ago, in the living room of a private home, I met a number of young Mormon elders. (They never should be called "elders" for they are all very much "youngers." They are usually boys just out of college.) We were discussing, in the presence of an interested party, the differences between the teachings of the Mormon Church and the teachings of the Bible. These young men said, "Our church is the only true church." (This is a

claim they consistently make.) “Our church is the only true church, and the reason we know this to be true is that we have apostles. No other church has any apostles, but the true church of Jesus Christ had apostles.” I said to them, “You are very badly mistaken. The church that I belong to has apostles too.” “Oh,” they said, “what church is that? We’ve never heard of another church that has apostles.” I said, “It happens to be the original church with the original apostles.” They said, “How could this be?” I said, “First, tell me, who are the apostles in your church?” They named off a list which at that time included the then Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, and others. I said, “The only one I have ever heard of in that list is Benson, and I have never seen any particular qualifications on his part to be an apostle.” “Well,” they said, “who are the apostles in your church?” I said, “Peter, James and John, and all the others.” Again they said, “How could this be?” I said, “It is very simple. If I want to know what an apostle says, all I have to do is turn to the New Testament, and there I find it. If I want to know the opinion of the Apostle Paul on a subject, I can turn immediately to what Paul has said. Or the Apostle John. Or the Apostle Peter. You see the church rests upon the foundation of the apostles.” And I added, “That marks your apostles as spurious, false apostles, because the apostles are to lay foundations and the Mormon Church did not begin until the 19th century, many centuries after the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ. If yours are the true apostles, then that would put the foundation up somewhere around the roof line.” Whoever heard of pouring foundations that far along in construction? No, the church’s foundation was laid by the apostles in the testimony they have given to Jesus Christ, “the truth as it is in Jesus,” {cf, Eph 4:21}. That is the foundation. “Any other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid,” {cf, 1 Cor 3:11}.

There is no other line of truth about Jesus Christ. There is no other information to be given about Jesus than the apostles have given. There is nothing else. If there seems to be, as Paul says to the Galatians, “it is another gospel,” {cf, Gal 1:6-7}. It is not the same thing. It is something different. Here is the foundation, and upon this the church is built, and from this comes its strength.

The apostolic gift is still being given today, and it is needed wherever new churches are beginning.

It is not that any new truth is being added to the Scriptures, but the whole body of truth which is given is taken by those who have the apostolic gift and is imparted to new churches wherever they begin. This is always the task of an apostle, to start new churches. We call them pioneer missionaries today. Through the course of church history there have been great apostles as Adaniram Judson in Burma, William Carey in India, Hudson Taylor in China. These are men who had the apostolic gift and were responsible to impart the whole faith to new churches.

Now, along with the apostles are the **prophets**. Not all of the New Testament was written by the apostles and none of the Old. The Old Testament was written by the prophets, and also there were New Testament prophets. Men such as Mark and Luke and James and Jude were not apostles, but, nevertheless, they helped lay the foundations of the church in writing the Scriptures. They are New Testament prophets, and there are others mentioned.

The gift of a prophet differs from an apostle in that the apostle has the word of authority. He gives an authoritative declaration of the whole body of truth concerning Jesus Christ. But the prophetic gift is to interpret that authoritative word and so to explain it that the truth becomes clear and vital and compelling. The word prophet suggests that very thing. It comes from a root word which means “to cause to shine,” with the prefix *pro*, which means “before.” Someone who stands before and causes the word to shine – that is a prophet. This is beautifully reflected in Peter’s second letter. He says, “We have a more sure word of prophecy which shines as a light in a dark place,” {cf, 2 Pet 1:19}. That is the prophet’s task.

Paul says in First Corinthians, “to prophesy is to speak unto edification, encouragement and comfort,” {cf, 1 Cor 14:3}: To so speak as to build with a word of edification. The church owes much to prophets. Not only were the Scriptures given to us by certain of the prophets but the great theologians of the church have been men with a prophetic gift. Some of you own a Scofield Reference Bible. It has helpful notes written by Dr. Cyrus Scofield who was not a clergyman, not ordained to the ministry, but who was a lawyer, a layman. He had the gift of a prophet and his writings have been helpful to people in explaining the revelations of the apostles. He has made them clear, made them to shine,

made them understandable. Many of the great leaders of the church have been prophets, as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the evangelical theologians of our day. Many pastors and Bible teachers also have prophetic gifts. The men who bless your hearts at Bible conferences are speaking as prophets, making the truth clear and shining and gripping. Billy Graham has this ministry, along with the gift of an evangelist.

Then we come to the third ministry here – **evangelists**. This is linked with the pastor-teachers. Evangelists and teaching-pastors work together, just as the apostles and prophets work together. In the body as a whole, the evangelists and teaching-pastors work with individuals within the church. The evangelist is concerned with the beginning of the Christian life, while the teaching-pastor is concerned with the development and the growth of that life. Therefore, evangelists are basically obstetricians, having to do with birth, and teaching-pastors are pediatricians, having to do with diets and diseases and the need for fresh air and exercise.

To return to the figure of a building, an evangelist is the quarryman, the man out in the rock quarry who digs the rock out, cuts it loose from its basic structure, and breaking it out, separates the rock into smaller pieces. The teaching-pastor then becomes the stone mason, the one who shapes the rock, puts it in proper form and fits it into the building in its proper place, according to the great blueprint of the Architect. This is the work of these two gifts together in the body of Christ.

Now, all Christians are expected to evangelize, but not all have the gift of an evangelist. Perhaps I can make that clear. All Christians evangelize as witnesses, but a witness is different than an evangelist. A witness is simply one who tells what happened to him. That is all. Any Christian and all Christians are expected to relate what happened, to be able to give a simple testimonial of what Jesus Christ has done. This is as easy as talking about any other experience. If you can talk about what a joy it was to get married, how wonderful your husband or your wife is, or your children, or your grandchildren, you can also witness for Christ. To talk about these things simply and naturally, that is a Christian witness. But an evangelist goes further. An evangelist knows how to explain the why, and the how, of the great redeeming story of Jesus Christ. He is able to proclaim the truths that pro-

duce a new birth. He is forever dealing with the great proclamation that God has not left man in a hopeless condition but has made a way at great cost through the cross and the resurrection, by which men and women who struggle on in their endless fight against the deteriorating forces of life can be set free and given a new start and a new basis for battle. That is the message of the evangelist.

It is the message of hope and of joy and of gladness. The evangelist's task is not to go about denouncing sin. He may call people's attention to that which is causing them so much misery and heartache in their life, but his job is not to denounce sin. It is not to thunder away at people, and tell them what miserable creatures they are, and that God is waiting to strike them dead with thunderbolts of judgment from the heavens. It is not to expose the horrors of hellfire, and to hang sinners over it until they writhe and tremble. That is not the task of an evangelist. (This the work of a prophet, if it needs to be done at all.) The evangelist's work is to talk about the overwhelming grace of God and what he has done in human life, the overpowering love of the Father that is calling people back to himself and offering to set their twisted lives straight when they open their hearts to the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. That is an evangelist.

Many people today possess the gift of an evangelist – both men and women. They can exercise it anywhere. It doesn't have to be done in mass meetings. Billy Graham's ministry is not the only kind of evangelism there is. The gift of an evangelist can be exercised to a single individual, as you see in the Scriptures when Philip spoke to the Ethiopian eunuch and told him of the grace of Jesus Christ. An evangelist can exercise his gift anywhere.

Linked with this is the work of a **teaching-pastor**. These are also called *elders* in the Scripture, as well as *overseers* or *bishops*. Overseers and bishops happen to be the same Greek word; it is simply translated two different ways. "Bishop" is the English translation of *episcopus*, and the literal meaning of that is "overseer." Elders or bishops were always limited to one locality, one group of Christians, one church. A man who was an elder in one church was not also an elder in another place. He could be an elder or a teaching-pastor only in one place.

Nor were these always men who devoted their full time to this ministry. In this church we have not one pastor or three, but thirteen. They are all called to exercise the gift of an elder, the gift of a pastor, a teaching-pastor. These are the ruling elders.

There are also some in the New Testament who are elders, but are not called ruling elders. Those would include ministries such as Sunday School teachers, Home Bible class leaders, and boy's and girl's group leaders. Anyone who exercises the gift of teaching and shepherding within the church is a pastor-teacher whether he is full-time at the work or not.

But, in addition, there are those who spend time in administration or ruling. These are the chief leaders of a church, the ruling elders. Now how do they rule? "Not as lords," Peter says, "over God's heritage," {cf, 1 Pet 5:3 KJV}. They are not to be bosses. They are not to tell people what to do as the final authority and what they say goes. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples once, "Be not as the Gentiles are, lording it over others," {cf, Mark 10:42-45}. The rulers of the church do not exercise their authority in that sense, as bosses in the church. They are to rule as examples, Peter says. When they do something, others will be motivated to do it. But if the teaching pastors do not show in their own lives an example of what they teach, they have no other authority. Their authority comes from their spirituality, from their spiritual relationship to God. If they lose that spirituality, they also lose their authority. It is not the office that gives them the right to rule, it is the man and his gift before God.

Now these are the four developing and training ministries of the church. A few men, in the course of the history of the church, have had all four of these gifts. Certainly the Apostle Paul is one. Paul was an apostle, certainly a prophet, and also an evangelist and teaching pastor. He exercised all these gifts on one occasion or another. All of them are especially needed in today's confused world.

Where there is weakness here, there is bound to be weakness in the church. Where there is strength here, that strength will be imparted to the whole church and the church will become powerful again. These men are set by Jesus Christ within the church to exercise these particular gifts. They are there to equip the saints unto the work of the ministry. That is not easy to do. Saints are very difficult people at times. Contrary to popular impression, saints are not made of plaster. They are sometimes made of very hard, resistant materials. They are certainly not made of sugar and spice and everything nice. They much more closely conform to the frogs and snails and puppy-dog tails. Saints are often made up of stubborn hardness, harder than diamonds, and laziness, slower than Christmas. In other words, they are made of the same stuff as pastors and teachers!

God trains saints by starting with the leaders, and knocking the rough spots off them, and shaping them up. The leader really can't do much to help others unless he has been through this treatment himself. But all this is necessary in the shaping of us up together, in building this amazing building that God is building today, this great structure which in secret is taking shape through history, invisible to the world. God is building a building that will be for his habitation, not only now but through all eternity. One of the most amazing things happening in human history today is the structure and building of the church. As Christians, we need to get our eyes off the superficialities to the reality of this – to hear and see the exciting things that God the Holy Spirit is doing in our midst, the way he is taking us and shaping us, molding us and knocking off the rough spots, and putting us into place.

In our next study together we will start at this point and see how the Holy Spirit uses these four functionaries within the church to equip the saints, to perfect the saints, unto the work of their ministry.

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Shaping Up the Saints

by Ray C. Stedman

This week the eyes of the whole world were fastened upon an event of historic significance in the meeting of the Roman Catholic Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury. We were told that this was the first official meeting of these two heads of churches for four hundred years, since the time of the Reformation, when Henry VIII split off the English church from the Roman Catholic Church. It was a very newsworthy event. But when that event is measured against the letter to the Ephesians, it is seen to be a relatively insignificant thing and of no real importance in the life and power of the church.

There is a truly hopeful movement in our day, but it is not the coming together of long separated communions. It is rather the restoration that is going on in many places around the world of the original pattern of operation for the church, the body of Christ. From this pattern we have so long drifted that we have almost forgotten it existed. But the Holy Spirit is calling men back again to the original intention of God. That intention is outlined for us in this great passage in Ephesians, the fourth chapter, the first sixteen verses. We are nearing now the close of our study in this passage concerning the ministry of the saints.

I should like, therefore, to review briefly the major points we have covered so far:

- We learned that the true church is not made up of those who attend or join a congregation, but, rather, it is made up of all those who are regenerated by personal faith in Jesus Christ. That is what constitutes the unity of the church. It is not, therefore, a unity that can be produced by men. It is achieved only by the Spirit of God taking up residence in the hearts of believing men and women. That unity never needs to be
- created by men; it needs only to be maintained. That is where the emphasis must be put today.
- Second, we learned that every member of the body of Christ is given a specific capacity for service. The whole aim and purpose of your life must be related to that gift of Christ to you, if your life is to be meaningful or significant by any eternal measurement. Where these gifts and capacities are being exercised in the power of the Spirit, the church once again becomes a vital, transforming, powerful influence in society, and Christian life becomes for the individual an exciting, gripping thing; there is nothing boring about it, nothing trite, nothing banal.
- Then, third, we learned that these gifts are to be exercised in two directions. A Christian can exercise his gift either in the world, in a ministry of service to men and women who are not yet Christians, or in the church, among the body of believers, to encourage and help other Christians in their development, or, to some degree, in both.
- Then, fourth, we learned the Holy Spirit has set up a process of developing or coordinating these gifts together in the body of Christ through the ministry of four special functions – apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors (pastor-teachers).

In our last message we saw that the apostles and the prophets have already fulfilled the major ministry of laying the foundations of the church. It was given to them to lay the foundation and those foundations are visible in the Scriptures, the great revelation of God concerning his Son, Jesus Christ. The revelation is all about Christ. That is why the Apostle Paul

says, “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” {1 Cor 3:11 KJV}. There is no other. No life will ever stand the test of time or eternity unless it is built upon that foundation. Jesus himself made that clear. He said there were only two possible foundations, the rock and the sand. If a man builds upon the sand, no matter how impressive his life may be, in time of stress the foundation will be revealed. Unless it is built upon the rock it will never stand.

- We saw, fifthly, that there are apostles and prophets today in a secondary sense, but in the primary sense this ministry was fulfilled only in the beginning. But evangelists and pastor-teachers are still with us and very much in evidence. Upon them now falls the main task of completing the work of “equipping the saints unto the work of the ministry.”

That is declared so clearly in Ephesians 4:11-12:

And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ. {Eph 4:11-12 RSV}

I should like to focus on one word in this verse, the word “equipping.” What does this mean? How is this done? This verb, in the original language, is *katartismōn*, from which we get our English word, “artisan” – artist or craftsman, a mechanic, someone who works with his hands and accomplishes things. It is a special point of interest that this word first appears in our New Testament in connection with the calling of the disciples. When Jesus walked out along the Sea of Galilee, he saw the two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew and James and John, sitting in a boat, busily engaged doing something. What were they doing? They were mending their nets. The word “mending” is the word translated here “equipping.” It is the same word, *katartizo*. They were mending, they were equipping their nets; they were getting them ready; they were fixing them up, preparing them.

This suggests, therefore, that the job of pastor-teacher is essentially that of mending the saints,

getting them ready. The word is also translated in our Scriptures as “fitting them out” or “preparing.” Thayer, who is the authority in this field, says it means “to make one what he ought to be.” I like that. That is the task of the pastor-teacher toward the saints. The nearest modern equivalent is “to shape up.” Therefore, our subject is, the shaping up of the saints.

There are two things we need to say about this. We must note the method by which this is accomplished, and the spirit or **heart attitude** by which it is carried out. Because the latter is much misunderstood, I want to start there.

Shape up! That sounds harsh, doesn’t it? It has overtones of the brutal and tyrannical. It conjures up the image of an ecclesiastical sergeant-at-arms, or a pastoral pop-off, who thunders denunciations at his people.

Let’s be honest and admit that there have been plenty of this kind of pastor-teachers – far too many of them. Even in the early church there was at least one. His name was Diotrephes. You’ll find him mentioned in John’s third letter: “Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence” {cf, 3 Jn 1:9}, he is called. But this image is a distortion of the scriptural concept of a pastor-teacher. Remember that we have already seen that this concept of a pastor-teacher covers a far wider range than the traditional view of a pastor. It includes also Sunday School teachers, child evangelism workers, teachers and leaders of Home Bible Discussion groups and of women’s classes. It refers to anyone who acts as a teacher or a shepherd in any sense. Such is a pastor-teacher: any who serves in this capacity, no matter how limited it may be. It may even include a ministry to your own children in your home. Thus it involves a very wide range.

But we must first understand the spirit in which this ministry is to be exercised. The Scriptures specifically warn against the idea of tyranny, of being an ecclesiastical or religious autocrat. The Apostle Peter writes to the elders as, “a fellow elder with you,” and he says, “Take the leadership, the oversight, over God’s people, but not as lords over God’s heritage,” {cf, 1 Pet 5:1-4}. Not as lords! The Revised Standard Version puts it this way “not domineering over those in your charge,” {1 Pet 5:3a RSV}.

You can see this is a quite different Peter speaking here than the brash disciple of the Gos-

pels. Here is a man who has been chastened and humbled, and who is now fulfilling the commission the Lord Jesus gave him after the resurrection when he repeated three times the question, “Peter do you love me?” and thrice said, “Feed my sheep, feed my lambs,” {see, John 21:15-19}. Here Peter’s words are an echo of the Lord’s words, feed the sheep, don’t fleece them.

Remember that occasion when the disciples were quarreling among themselves (this is almost incredible, but it is recorded in the Scriptures that they were arguing as to who should be the greatest among them when they came into the kingdom) and the Lord overheard them. He said to them, “The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them” (this is the same phrase Peter uses in the negative) “and their great men exercise authority over them,” {Matt 20:25 RSV}. The key word there is *over*. In the world, power is measured by how much authority you have over someone else. You often hear people ask, how many men do you have under you? Or another will boast, “You know, I have just received a promotion. I now have five hundred men under me.” But our Lord has said that in the day when God will measure the worthwhileness of men, the standard will not be how many men you had serving you, but how many you have served. It will not be how many have done something at your command, but how many have you done something for? That is the measure of power in the kingdom of heaven! Jesus added these words, “Whoever would be great among you must become the servant of all,” {cf, Matt 20:25-27, Mark 10:42-44}.

Now those are not words to be taken lightly. Every teacher, especially, must heed these words. We must ever remember that we are not bosses. We are instruments, we are servants in this work of building the church. There is a process of selection going on all the time and it is the Master Builder who selects the stone. He has a place here for a certain stone in the building of his church, and he looks about for that which will fit the place. He picks up a stone and at first it looks as if it is going to be just the right one. He lifts it over and tries it out, but it doesn’t fit and he rejects it. This is what goes on in the church sometimes. Leaders are put in certain positions for awhile and it looks as if they are going to be effective, but then they are rejected. It is the Lord’s prerogative to do this. Then perhaps he chips out others and shapes them up, knocking off some of the high spots, and finally fits

in a piece exactly where it belongs. This is often what he is doing through the ministry of teaching. The teacher who is his instrument must remember that it is not his task to make the final decision. It is the Lord’s responsibility. The authority of a teacher is never that of a tyrant or of a ruler. It is that of one who comes as a voice of Another.

Further, the ministry of shepherding and teaching must be done, as we are told in the Scriptures, without desiring personal glory. Many of you have had the privilege of teaching someone else. You well know that right there is often where the full force of temptation to pride can strike you. There is something very pleasing to the ego to stand in front of a group and have every eye looking at you and every ear listening carefully to what you have to say. It is so terribly easy to love that feeling and to find ways of nurturing it and encouraging it.

To speak very frankly and openly to you, one of the reasons why I only infrequently go to the back of the room at the end of a message to greet people is because I found that when I did it regularly it was ministering to my ego in such a way that I had a battle with pride. I had to stop because people were saying such nice things to me, and I found myself loving to hear them. It is easy for a teacher or a pastor to carry on his work for hidden reasons of personal prestige or glory. We love to be regarded as dedicated, mature Christians. We are all too much aware, at times, of our seeming sacrifice to time and money to do this work. We think that we really deserve the attention and praise of others because we have been faithful at what we have been given to do.

Of course, we are far too subtle to ever say so. But it is evident in the hurt feelings we display when something doesn’t quite go our way, and in our desire to quit if we haven’t been noticed for a while, as well as in the jealous cattiness by which we refer to another’s ministry who is doing the same type of thing. It is apparent in the sarcasm we use with those listening to us, or the false modesty we often employ. I have long ago learned that when a man says to me, “I am only trying to serve the Lord in my own humble way,” that I am talking to the proudest man in six counties around.

We soon discover that it is quite possible to use the work of the Lord to satisfy our personal egos. And that is always a devilish thing. That subtle inflating of ego is what the Word of God warns

consistently against in regard to teachers. The Lord Jesus pricked that balloon when he said, “The Pharisees love greetings in the market places and the best seats in the meetings, and to be called doctor when they go about,” (Rabbi is what he said, but we use the word doctor.) “But,” he said, “you are not to be called rabbi, for one is your Master and all you are brethren,” {cf, Matt 23:6-8}. That means that you pastors, you leaders, you teachers, are no better than anyone else. You are no greater than they are. The only authority you have is the authority of the truth. That’s all. Your own spirituality must rest on that.

It is also clear from the Scriptures that pastors and teachers are not to be motivated by greed – not for filthy lucre, not for love of money. There are places today where that may be hard to understand. Conditions must have been quite different in the early days than they are now. The pastorate has seldom been a place to get rich, and certainly Sunday School teachers and others don’t teach for love of money. But it can often be a problem. Pastor-teachers are to be examples. That is what Peter adds, “being examples to the flock,” {1 Pet 5:3b RSV}. That, again, reflects the Lord’s words when he said of himself, “When the good shepherd puts forth his sheep, he goes before them,” {cf, John 10:4}. He does everything first. He leads them out by doing the things first. No teacher has the right to teach whose life does not exemplify the teaching. If he tries it, to say one thing and be another, the Lord will ‘pull the rug out from under that man’ and his ministry will be despised.

Now let us go on to the second thing, the **method of this work** of shaping up the saints.

How are the saints to be fitted out? How are they equipped? What is the process? The answer is all contained in the title given to this ministry: Pastor-teacher, shepherd and teacher, therefore, shepherding and teaching. The Apostle Paul put it in a slightly different way in describing his own ministry to the Colossians. He said to them concerning the Lord Jesus,

Him we proclaim [that is always the center of the message], **warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, in order that we might present every man mature in Christ.** {cf, Col 1:28}

There you have it. That is, the process exactly. “Warning every man and teaching every man, in all wisdom.”

Notice the balance there. What a wonderful sanity of balance the Scriptures maintain. It is not just teaching. It is not simply standing up and imparting information about doctrine. That must be preceded by the ministry of warning. I wonder if your reaction to that wasn’t the same as mine when I first read it. “Isn’t this the wrong order? Shouldn’t this be reversed? Shouldn’t it be teaching and warning? ‘Teaching every man and warning every man’”? Surely, you teach them first, and if they don’t receive that, then you warn them what the results will be, isn’t that the normal order? That is the way it struck me, until I looked more closely at this word translated *warning*. I found that is it the word for “mind,” plus the verb “to put.” “To put in mind” is the idea. That is, to call attention to something. When I saw that, I saw clearly that the order here is extremely important. You must get someone’s attention first, and then you say what you have to say. I wonder if the reason why so much of our teaching is weak and powerless is because we try to impart it without first captivating the interest of our hearers.

There is an old, almost odorous story about a man who wanted to train his mule. The first thing he did was to pick up a big stick and hit the mule a resounding wallop between the ears. As the mule staggered about someone said to him, “What is the matter? Why did you do that?” And the man said, “In order to teach a mule, you must get his attention first.” That may not be true of mules, but there is a good deal of truth in it as to humans. This is exactly what the apostle is saying here. Interest must first be awakened.

Much of the problem of teaching is that we don’t take the trouble to do that first. There is, therefore, no note of reality about it. We talk about the Scriptures, but, in the ears of our hearers, they are something quite remote from life. We speak of heaven and hell, and goodness and truth, and all of it sounds unreal. No wonder preaching has been described this way,

A mild-mannered man standing up before mild-mannered people and exhorting them to be more mild-mannered.

One recent writer put it,

“The gospel of love is a volume, bound in rose leaves and printed with peach juice by the beaks of hummingbirds on the leaves of lilies.”

How robust! No wonder the world holds this message in contempt. Yet it is supremely relevant to life. It is talking about you and me, and it is what we need to hear.

The Lord Jesus always captured attention when he taught. I often laugh as I read the accounts of his teaching. There is that story when he was preaching a great lesson on faith in him as the bread of life. Evidently the apostles were among the crowd and he could see them yawning and restless, “we’ve heard this a thousand times before.” They were paying no attention. What did he do at the end of the message? He sent them out into the sea alone into a storm. When the winds were howling and the waves were threatening to engulf the boat, the disciples were hanging on for their lives in the midst of the storm. Then, looking out through the darkness they saw, to their fright and amazement, their Lord walking on the water. As he came to them across the water, he certainly had their attention. When he got into the boat the first thing that he said to them was, “Oh, you of little faith,” {cf, Matt 14:31}. Now they began to listen, and they never forgot that lesson.

When the Apostle Paul went to Athens to preach to the sophisticated Greeks, he didn’t get up on Mars Hill and announce, “Ladies and gentlemen of Athens, I have come to speak to you on the moral superiority of Christianity to paganism.” No, he had been walking around the city noting certain things first, and when he got up he said, “You people are certainly very religious. As I have gone about this city I have seen nothing but altars everywhere. I even found one erected to an Unknown God. Now that is very interesting. There is something about God that you don’t know yet and that is what I have come to talk to you about,” {cf, Acts 17:23}. Thus he had their attention, “putting in mind” first, not finger-wagging. The key to true teaching is awakening interest, arousing attention. It is “warning every man” and then “teaching every man” in Christ.

Now I have only a moment to dwell on the matter of **teaching**. I want to say but a word now,

and then we will conclude this in our final message of this series.

Someone has defined preaching or teaching as “the ministry of comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable.” That is exactly what Paul is saying, is it not? Only he puts it in the right order. “Disturbing the comfortable,” first warning – and then, teaching. This needs to be done again and again. That is the way the saints are fitted out – equipped.

It is no good having people come to church to hear the same old thing. One of the weaknesses of the American church is that we love to come only to hear someone say what we already know. It is because we love to feel, “Well, this is for the fellow behind me, or that lady over there, but thank God it doesn’t reach me. I can say a hearty Amen.” Too many Christians want to come to church only so they can say, “Amen.” But that isn’t what the truth should do to us. The truth ought to get under our collars and into our hearts and bother us greatly at times. Oh, it is often comforting, wonderfully comforting. It is also very enlightening, and we can learn a great deal. But before it can be comforting, even before it can be enlightening, it needs to be disturbing. That is where every teacher of the truth needs to put a great deal of emphasis.

Once attention is gained, the task then is to teach the truth. It is the truth that changes and delivers man. This teaching the truth is what Peter calls, “feeding the flock of God which is among you,” {cf, 1 Pet 5:2}. It requires faithfulness to the whole counsel of God, not riding theological hobbies. It is not preaching continually on one theme, or picking out all the verses that have to do with one subject, as baptism or the coming of the Lord, and forever thumping on that tub. It is to expound the whole truth of God. That is why there is nothing better as a means of doing this than the expository message. The expository method – preaching through a book, or a section of a book, leaving out nothing, commenting on everything, touching it all – that is the best method.

Scripture is written in that way. Isaiah says that the revelation of God comes in this manner, “Here a little, there a little; line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” {cf, Isa 28:13}. You don’t find in the Scriptures a chapter on justification and another on sanctification and another on baptism, but it is all woven together. You can never take a sizable section of

the Word of God and comment on it without presenting truth in balance.

It is the truth in balance which does the trick of equipping the saints. Only the Word of God can teach a new Christian the difference between a zealous, dedicated heart which operates in the energy of the flesh and looks so spiritual, and that quiet commitment of the Spirit-filled life which faithfully does a thing whether it is being observed or not. It is the Word of God only which can teach us that. But, Oh! what a difference in the church when we stop being flagrantly zealous and start being spiritually powerful. It is the pounding of the hammer of the Word that finally pulverizes the granite hardness of our rationalizing hearts and breaks through to make us aware that God is trying to say something. It is the truth, driven home by a heart made earnest in prayer, that melts and softens and heals, and thus causes individuals to grow.

I want you to see one vivid illustration of how successful this is, and then we are through: Look at Acts 19; Paul is describing his experience in the city of Ephesus, the very city to which this letter is written. In Verse 8 we read,

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God [three months of teaching]; but when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of

the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them [i.e., the synagogue], taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus [in the margin you will note the added words, present in many manuscripts, “from the fifth hour to the tenth”], this continued for two years, ...”
{Acts 19:8-10a RSV}

That means that Paul taught these people for five hours a day, every day, for two years. That adds up to some 25,000 hours of teaching. Is it any wonder that the verse concludes,

... so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.
{Acts 19:10b RSV}

That is what it takes to shape up the saints unto the work of the ministry.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this pointed word to our hearts, especially to those of us who have responsibility in teaching and leadership to the rest of the church. We pray that we may be found faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. In Christ's name, Amen.

On Growing Up

by Ray C. Stedman

We have been examining the church, trying to learn from the words of the great apostle why the church is here on earth. We saw that it is not here to do what other groups can do; it is here to do what no other group can possibly do. It is here to manifest the life and power of Jesus Christ in this 20th century hour. This is the ministry of Christ exactly as it was detailed by the prophet Isaiah in his 61st chapter, which our Lord quoted in the synagogue of Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... to bring good tidings ... to bind up the brokenhearted ... to proclaim liberty..."

Then we saw how that ministry is to be carried out through the ministry of many, not just a few. It takes the whole church to do the work of the church. That the work is to be carried on by the exercise of certain gifts which were given by the resurrected Christ when he ascended on high to the Father's throne and took over the reins of the universe. "All power is given unto me," he said, "in heaven and on earth," {Matt 28:18b KJV}. In order to make that power manifest among men, he gave gifts unto men – and those gifts are manifest in his church. Each Christian has received a gift for ministry, and the supreme task of his life as a Christian is to discover that gift and put it to work. That is the only way the church will ever be what it was designed to be. You can only fulfill that peculiar function in the body of Christ which is allotted to you. If you do not do it, the whole body suffers. Therefore, it is exceedingly essential that we know what our gifts are and begin to manifest them.

We saw not only that the reason for living centers around this gift, but that the full provision of our Lord for developing and operating these gifts is through the molding ministry of apostles and prophets who lay the foundations of faith; and evangelists and pastor-teachers, who use the Word of God to motivate the people of God and thus direct them and shape them into what God wants them to be. Now there is the whole program.

We come now to the final purpose, the goal of all this, in Ephesians 4, beginning with Verse 13. Verse 12 tells us the special gifts are given "for the equipment of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ." The work of the ministry is to the world; the building up of the body of Christ is a ministry to other Christians. But to what goal does it all aim? To what purpose? Paul says,

... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. {Eph 4:13-16 RSV}

That is a great statement. Did you notice it carefully? There is a really startling thing in that statement, and I wonder if you caught the full impact of it. The apostle is telling us what the end and goal of all God's far flung enterprise among men is. What is God doing? What is he after?

Note Paul does not say a thing about the evangelization of the world. The goal of God's working is not to evangelize the world. I know there is the great commission in the Bible. I believe in it fully. I know that Jesus sent us out to preach the gospel to every creature, and that this is often held up as the supreme aim and function of the Church. It is a very important function, but it is not the supreme thing, not the final goal. The apostle says nothing here about the establishment of the millennium. I

believe in that too. I believe in the great vision of the prophets that there is coming a day when peace shall reign on the earth and men shall melt their spears into plowshares and make their swords into pruning hooks and never learn war anymore. I believe there is a day coming when righteousness shall prevail across the face of the earth, and all the stories of injustice and heartache and tragedy that we are so exposed to now will be forgotten. But that is not the purpose Paul has in mind as the great and supreme reason for the existence of the church. He says nothing about bringing in world peace and justice. All of these will be accomplished, but they are not the essential things.

The supreme thing, the paramount thing, the thing God is after above everything else (did you catch it?), is mature manhood. It is you, fulfilling your humanity, being what God had in mind when he made man and woman in the first place. It is not that we should be white-robed saints, or that he wants to produce accomplished churchmen, or religious experts. He desires nothing of this kind, but that you may be mature, grown up, responsible, well-adjusted, wholehearted human beings, as God intended men and women to be.

Now it takes the church to do that. You cannot be that apart from the working of the church as God intended the church to work.

Deep down at the deepest level of your heart, is it not true that this is what you yourself passionately desire? You want to be a whole person, a complete human being. You want to fulfill what God has put into you. Well, that is exactly what he wants too. The proof that this is deep in every heart is the fact which psychologists confirm. We all have a mental image of ourselves which, to some degree, approximates this idea. We all think of ourselves in most ways as mature, much more mature than we really are, for our power to deceive ourselves is sometimes almost incredible. Take even those times when we think we are being ruthless and brutally honest with ourselves. Then we often describe ourselves in the most wretched terms. We deplore ourselves. We say, "I'm nothing but a stubborn, foolish person." Ah yes, but let someone agree with that and see what your reaction is. We say, "What do you mean? Why do you call me that?"

It is because we all have this inner conviction that we are approaching maturity, because that is

what we so desperately want, that is what we are basically made for.

Why is it that we are so mistaken on this? Well, it is obvious, is it not? It is because we have the wrong measuring stick. We have adopted the measuring stick of the world, and it is totally false. When we apply it, we find ourselves able to measure up to some degree because the measuring stick of the world is to measure ourselves by one another. We compare ourselves with someone else. Each of us has someone mentally tucked away in the back of our mind, whom we drag out whenever we need him and whom we consider to be less mature, less developed, less of a real human being than we are. What a comfort they are to us! It may be our mother-in-law, our boss, or someone else, and we say, "Well, at least I'm not like so-and-so," and thus reassure ourselves. But we are using the wrong measuring stick.

A little boy came to his mother one day and said, "Mother, guess what! I'm 8 feet 4 inches tall!" His mother, in great surprise inquired into it and found he was using a 6-inch ruler; he was actually 4 feet 2 inches.

Now that is the problem before us. We measure ourselves by one another and the apostle says in Second Corinthians that those who compare themselves with themselves or with someone else, "are not wise" {2 Cor 10:12 KJV}, they are deceiving themselves.

Now, twice in this great passage, Paul sets before us the only realistic measuring stick there is in the universe. Twice he reveals what will be the final standard by which we will ultimately be measured as to the progress we have made in life. It is the measuring stick of Christ, "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" and in Verse 15, "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ." There is the measuring stick. It is not Christ the miracle worker, not Christ the incomparable teacher, but Jesus Christ the man, the Son of God and Son of Man. He is whom God measures us by, and the one whom we are to measure ourselves by.

This is tremendous, if you think about it, because it means we must understand something of the humanity of Jesus our Lord. We must realize what a thorough-going man he was. And that means exposure to the Gospels. We must live through those stories of our Lord again until we see him manifesting all the great qualities of manhood;

we must see the tenderness and toughness of Christ, the humor and humility, the discipline and delightfulness that made him such a winsome companion, and yet see how he could be stern and unbending and inflexibly set upon a goal. We need to see both the serenity and authority of Jesus the man. The more you gaze at this man, Christ Jesus, the more you will find coming into focus a clear picture of what manhood is intended to be, and what you can be, under God. He is the measurement of our maturity.

If you take that measurement and measure yourself by it, it is pretty discouraging, is it not? Yet the only realistic word we have to measure ourselves by is to ask ourselves, "How much am I like Jesus Christ?" It must not be only a feeble attempt to imitate him. Imitations are worthless; they can never be anything but shabby, cheap imitations. This is not what Paul is talking about. He is talking about *becoming like* Christ by *obeying* him, *appropriating* him. Not by *hearing*, but by *doing*. That is always the emphasis of Scripture.

I have been impressed anew in reading through the Gospels at the way Jesus continually comes back to this. He says, "not he who hears my words, but he who does them, he it is that is acceptable to my Father," {cf, John 5:45-47}. It is not those who say they have helped the weak and ministered to the sick, etc., but those who have done it. James writes with great bluntness and says, "faith without works is dead," {Jas 2:20, 2:26 KJV}. He stresses putting faith into action and this is what Paul stresses in this phrase, "the knowledge of the Son of God."

You cannot know Jesus Christ until you follow him. You will never know him without that. The disciples had an acquaintanceship with Jesus Christ before they became his disciples, that is obvious from the Gospels, but they never knew him until they left everything and followed him.

- Now, how does this measurement of maturity strike you?
- Does it discourage you?
- Are you saying to yourself, "If that is the standard, I'm giving up. I'll never be like him. If you expect me to measure my maturity by the maturity and manhood of Jesus Christ, then it is a hopeless cause."

Well, then, I think you need to note something else in this great section the apostle brings before us.

Notice the **process** by which maturity comes. This is very important. Twice again, in this great passage, Paul sets it before us. It is a process, he says, of growth. There it is in Verse 15:

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way ... {Eph 4:15 RSV}

Then again, in the latter part of Verse 16,

... when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth ... {Eph 4:16b RSV}

Growth is God's method. That immediately tells us two very encouraging things about this matter of becoming mature, not merely mature as a religious person, but mature as a human being:

1. First, it is something that does not take place suddenly. It is not something that happens overnight. It is a process; it is a matter that requires time.

I suggest that is extremely important. I know many Christians who are greatly disturbed when, having become Christians, they do not find themselves suddenly, remarkably, completely transformed into angelic creatures. They are greatly disturbed when they find the old life still very much present, and some of the old attitudes are still gripping and controlling their lives. They do not know what to make of this. They wonder if they are even Christian at all. Of course, they are Christian, if they have exercised faith in Jesus Christ and are resting upon him, but there is a process of growth which must follow and it takes time for this to take place.

That is why the Scriptures warn against putting someone into a position of authority who is a novice. He simply has not been a Christian long enough to have gone through enough experiences to have matured him to the place of carrying responsibility. It takes some time, inescapably.

Remember how the writer of Hebrews points that up, in reverse. He says to these Hebrews, "when for the time you ought to have been teachers, you need someone to teach you

again ...” {Heb 5:12}. That is, they had been Christians long enough to be teachers, but something else had arrested their development. Yet he makes clear that there is need for time.

Often this is the way the Christian life works. We come into it as newborn Christians, and for a long time we resist the great principles which make for Christian development. It takes quite a while for us to really learn that God intends to do something quite different with us than we thought he would when we grew up as natural men and women. We resist these changes. We do not like his dealings with us at times. Finally he brings us to the place where we give in and we accept and understand the principles, but then we learn it takes time to practice these principles even once we accept them and grasp them.

Someone has pointed out that it is like trying to learn how to swim by taking a correspondence course in swimming. You cannot learn it that way. You must get into the water. You have got to grow spiritually that way.

Then, as we go along, we discover that growth seems to be so slow, so discouraging. We think we have mastered something, we have at last overcome our hot tempers or our passionate natures, our lusts are subdued and we have learned how to be easygoing, friendly, outgoing people or to give up our bitterness, our grudges, our jealousies, and other ugly things, and then, suddenly, something will happen, we will be put with the wrong person and out it all comes again. Then we are *so* discouraged. We go to the Lord, and say, “Lord, what’s the matter? Why don’t you hurry up this process? I’m so tired of being immature.” Have you ever felt that way? I have, many times. But God has his own time and sometimes it takes almost a lifetime to grow up fully. I do not mean that you cannot come into relative maturity within a few years of conversion, but many of us are going to be at this process a long time before we grow up fully into Christ. God expects it to take some time. After all, as someone has pointed out, it takes God years to grow an oak tree, but he can grow a squash in three months. God is not interested in growing Christian squashes.

Nevertheless, I love to see evidence of eagerness for growth. I remember asking a boy

once how old he was. Quick as a flash he said, “I’m twelve, going on thirteen, soon be fourteen.” I like that eagerness to grow up.

But it is encouraging to us to realize this is a process of time and we do not need to be discouraged if we do not find we are completely like Christ yet. What we need to ask is, are we on the way, is there progress, are we moving in this direction?

2. Now the second thing this need for growth reveals to us is that progress is discernible by stages. Did you ever watch a child grow up? All of you who are parents know that growth follows a physical pattern, in discernible stages.

My wife and I had lunch recently with Dr. Harold Englund, of the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley. He was telling us about his fourteen year old boy and the amazement that he and his wife experience as they watch this boy shooting up into manhood. He has grown a foot in the last year! Dr. Englund illustrated that by saying that for fourteen years he had been able to wear a certain size of shoe without any rivalry, but this last year his son suddenly developed the same size of foot, and his father found him borrowing his shoes. But then he heaved a sigh of relief and said the last time he had bought a pair of shoes he found the boy had grown beyond him, and he was safe again.

Well, that is the way growth occurs. It is by stages, and you will find that the Scriptures reflect this as to the spiritual life. John speaks of children, young men, fathers, and there are other such comparisons in other parts of Scripture. There is a definite progression evident in the Christian life and there are definite characteristics of each stage along this line. We are to grow up stage by stage, and we can measure our growth by looking in two different directions:

- We can look back to the infantileness of childhood and see whether we are making progress away from immature attitudes and outlooks, or

- We can look at our present situation and see if the factors which made for growth are now present.

Growth does not come by trying. You cannot, as Jesus pointed out, “by taking thought” {Matt 6:27, Luke 12:25}, “add a cubit to your stature.” You cannot say, “Now I am going to try to grow.” Children would love to do this if they could, but they cannot.

Well, then, how do you grow?

You make sure that the factors that make for growth are present. That is the way you can measure your spiritual maturity, in those two different ways. That is exactly what the apostle does here.

1. He says first, in Verse 14,

... that we may no longer be children [there is the backward glance], **tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles.** {Eph 4:14 RSV}

Ask yourself, “Am I moving away from childish attitudes?”

It is important to point out that the Scripture exhorts us to be *childlike*, but never to be *childish*. Those are two different things:

- *Childlikeness* is that refreshing simplicity of faith which believes and acts without questioning; but
- *Childishness* is quite a different thing, and it is this which the apostle is talking about here.

There are two general characteristics of children:

- A. The first is instability. Children are notoriously fickle, their attention span is very short. You cannot interest them in one thing very long before they are after something else immediately.

I made the great mistake the other day of trying to get my four-year-old to make one choice among 31 flavors of ice cream. She could not read the names, but I held

her up so she could see the cartons – and ten minutes later we settled for plain vanilla!

You see this instability in young Christians, and in Christians who are old in time, but still are immature. There is a flightiness, an inconstancy, an inconsistency:

- You can see it in doctrine, as the apostle suggests here, “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” Did you know there are fads in the religious life, and they come and go like fashions in clothes? Immature Christians are always riding the crest of a new fad, forever picking up the newest thing that has hit, and usually it is presented in some kind of book. I find Christians are continually discussing some new, exciting book that seems to have all the answers to every spiritual problem. I have come to recognize through the years that is a mark of immaturity. They do not talk about the Bible that way, yet this is the book that really has the answer, the most exciting book of all. But it is always some writer whom they think has grasped the basic and central truth. You can see this vacillation in various ways in this matter of doctrine. There are hobbies which people identify themselves with. Prophecy can become a hobby, and then the spiritual life becomes a fad, then some other aspect of Christian life is taken up. People make a great deal of these, shifting from one thing to another, constantly changing. That is a mark of childishness, immaturity.
- You see it in actions as well. I have learned that the immature Christian manifests himself by unfaithfulness, by undependability. How many times have we asked someone to take on a task in the church and they assume it with some degree of eagerness, of vitality. But it is not very long before their interest wanes, they lose their

head of steam, and become discouraged. Before you know it they either do not show up at all, or they call you up and say, "I'm sorry, could you get someone else to do this." That is always a mark of immaturity, of childishness. Have you ever noticed that part of the fruit of the Spirit is not only love, joy, peace, longsuffering, and gentleness, but also faithfulness? Faithfulness, dependability, responsibility; that is a mark of maturity.

- You can see this childishness in immature Christians by their attendance at meetings. Most new Christians begin their Christian life with an eagerness to be at meetings. They love to hear the Word of God, they just cannot seem to get enough of truth. But watch them awhile. First, they stop coming to the midweek service, then the Sunday evening service, and after awhile they are sporadic at the morning service, attending, perhaps, only every other time. That is always a sign of immaturity, a sign that such have not yet learned to walk in full dependence on the Holy Spirit in Christian maturity.
- There are some, of course, who mistake rigidity for stability. They narrow their Christian life down to a narrow routine and then are faithful at that, and so they say this is a sign of maturity, of stability. No, they are not stable at all; they are just stuck! The mature Christian life is a life lived in the whole range of human experiences, but in all that entire range it is a life of responsible dependability. That is a true mark of maturity.

B. There is also a second mark of childishness, and that is to be undiscerning.

Did you ever notice how children are often unaware of danger? They may play in dangerous situations and be quite unaware that there is anything threatening them. New Christians, and older but immature Christians are like this.

- It is always manifest in their confident attitude, in the degree of almost arrogant certainty that they are not going to fall, no one need worry about them.

You see this in Peter before the cross. "Lord, these others may deny you, I wouldn't put it past them. I know these fellows, they're that kind. But Lord, there is one fellow you can count on and that's Peter. I'll see you through, Lord, I'll stay with you to the end." But the Lord said, "Thank you Peter, but before the cock crows twice tomorrow morning you will have denied me three times," {cf, Mark 14:29-30}. That is how much his zealous, earnest immaturity was worth.

It is so visible in immature Christians. There is an uncritical acceptance of whatever comes. They listen to anybody, and there is no fear that they will be trapped into anything. But those who have learned to walk with the Lord in maturity become like the Apostle Paul, they proceed in weakness and trembling. They realize that the enemy is subtle and can easily divert them, can easily trap them. They know they can easily fall into error if they are not walking constantly in careful expectancy that God will be with them, to keep them in the midst of perils.

Now, answer the question, "How about you?" How mature are you? Some of you have been Christians for years. Have you gotten away from childish tantrums, attitudes of inconsistency, undependability, and undiscerning naivete that leads you frequently into error so you find yourself again and again on the wrong side of things and did not realize how you got there? If you have, then you are maturing in Christ.

2. But there is a second thing, another factor that makes for growth, here in Verse 15. We measure our growth negatively by marking the distance we have moved from childishness, but there is a positive measurement also. It is

found in the phrase, “speaking the truth in love.” This is all one word in Greek, and a very interesting word. It could be translated “truthing in love,” i.e. living the truth in love. I find this to be very revealing.

It is exceedingly helpful to check yourself by asking this question: “How much do I really want to see myself the way I am? How much do I want to know the truth about myself?” I find there are many who do not want to know the truth about themselves at all. We all at times do not want to hear anyone tell us what is wrong and we resist every effort to unfold it to us. We do not even want to admit it to ourselves. We would rather live in a dream world, to view the world with rose-colored glasses, than to listen to blunt and brutal truth about ourselves.

There is a phenomenon which is often present among missionaries who first go out to foreign fields, called “culture shock.” Anyone who has lived at any length in a foreign country with a greatly different culture knows what this is. It happens when people find themselves plunged into a totally new situation where all the familiar cues that make them feel at ease with other people are absent. It can be a most shattering thing, a most disconcerting experience. You find yourself unable to communicate with others and thus to show them how intelligent, how educated you are. Especially is this true when there is a different language involved and even after months of study the most you can expect to do is to carry on a fairly intelligent conversation about the price of a sack of potatoes. You find yourself unable to display those qualities and virtues which won respect for you among others and you are reduced to regarding yourself almost as an idiot. This finds its manifestation in various ways, but essentially by way of rejection. Those who suffer from culture shock:

- Reject the country they are in; they cannot stand anything about it, everything is wrong – they criticize and carp and find fault with everything that happens.
- Or sometimes this reverses itself and they reject the mission board that sends them out. They blame them and their fellow

missionaries, saying that everything that has gone wrong is because they have not been told this or they were not trained to do that.

- Sometimes it takes other directions and turns inward upon themselves and they blame themselves for everything. They feel they are a total failure and a misfit and do not belong out there. This can also be very shattering.

But I am convinced, the longer I live as a Christian, that something very much like this takes place with every Christian. After all, Christianity is a totally different way of living. It is lived on a completely different level. The more we grasp that fact, the more we will discover that all the familiar props to our ego are taken away from us, and we are more or less suddenly confronted with the shock of self-discovery. We learn that much of our acceptance by others was dependent upon impressions we could make that did not find any reality in us. That can be a terribly disconcerting thing, a staggering, shattering thing. All these ego-salving techniques that the world employs, which we found perfectly acceptable before we became Christians, are unacceptable as Christians. The philosophy which approaches life on a tit-for-tat basis, “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours, etc.” is totally unacceptable in Christian life, and no longer to be approved. We must love our enemies and do good to those who spitefully use us, and pray for those who persecute us. The effect that we made upon others by the beauty of our form or figure or the dazzling character of our personality we find to be totally unimpressive to the Holy Spirit. He is not impressed by it in the least degree. This produces the shock of self-discovery, which so many immature Christians find to be a frightening thing.

But if it is truly grasped it is not frightening at all. It is the most hopeful thing that ever happened to you in your life. The moment you began to take a good, square, honest look at yourself and to see yourself as you are, with all the facade stripped away, may be the most painful, but it is also the most hopeful moment in life. Because, from then

on you can live in truth, open, unaffected, unashamed, protecting nothing, with no need for posture or for pretense any longer. You can be yourself, “truthing in love,” the greatest experience there is. That is the mark and measurement of maturity.

There is one final thing here and I will quickly mention that. In Verse 16, Paul says,

... from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and builds itself up in love. {Eph 4:16 RSV}

The apostle uses a word here which is used only once besides in the whole New Testament (Ephesians 2:21). It is this word that is translated “joined and knit together.” He is speaking about the body now, and he says that one of the factors that makes for growth is the acceptance of the ministry of other Christians to you, the fact that the parts of the body are designed to minister to each other, each part in it joined and knit together. The word comes from three words brought together. The apostle actually coins a word here to say what he wants to say. He takes a word which means “a joint,” two things put together; and then he uses the word “with”; and with these he links the word “to choose,” i.e., it’s God’s choice that has put you in the body of Christ, in the very place God wants you to be, among the Christians he wants you to be with, because you need them and they need you. In other words, there is to be a mutual ministry of acceptance, one with another.

Now that is very important. Do you know what that means? That means that you are where you are because that is where God wants you. He put you with the Christians in this place because they are the kind you need. That may be hard to swallow – some of them are pretty prickly, rather

thorny, hard to live with – but they are what you need and you are what they need. It is as each part of the body accepts this and ministers one to the other, each part doing what it was designed to do, not all trying to be alike but each one content to be different and yet to acknowledge that others, too, have the right to be different, that there comes growth in maturity unto the full manhood of Jesus Christ. Then do not reject God’s instruments.

To do so points up the fallacy, so common among American Christians, of moving from one church to another if you do not like the people where you are. That is totally inconsistent with the New Testament pattern. God put you where you are; you are to stay there and learn to live and walk and work there, and God will use that to make for growth in your life that you might be complete in Jesus Christ. That is what he wants. This is the only chance we have of being whole persons, to walk in honesty and acceptance in love.

Note that both of these are linked with that phrase, “in love.” As we walk this way, remember that day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, the Spirit of God is effecting a miracle and you and I are becoming like the manhood of Jesus Christ, formed in all the glory of that well-adjusted, completely oriented, stable, solid, wholehearted manhood, the maturity and stature of the fullness of Jesus Christ.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for this look at ourselves and our need of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, not only in our lives but in the lives of others about us, of their ministry to us as well as our ministry to them. Make us to accept this fully, and to walk in it, and grow in it until we fulfill this great desire of your heart and stand in maturity before you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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