

Equipping the Saints For the Work of Ministry

Diversity of Gifts in the Body

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Three weeks ago we began a brief series of 5 lessons dealing with a theme based on a comment the apostle Paul made in his letter to the church at Ephesus.
 - A. This is where the apostle Paul talked about the need of EVERY member of the body of Christ being equipped to perform the work of ministry.
 1. We have said all along that the work of ministry is two fold:
participating in SOME WAY to share the message of the gospel of Christ with others, and participating in SOME WAY to minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 2. In our last lesson we said the work of ministry can only be properly performed when we have grown in grace and knowledge.
 - a. When we grow in the ability to graciously and lovingly reach out to others, and we grow in our knowledge and understanding of the gospel of Christ, we will be able to do the

work the Lord has for us to do in His vineyard as faithful,
productive laborers.

3. At the conclusion of the lesson, we saw example after example of how Christians in the first century had such an impact on the world around them. They were proactive.
 - a. They prayed not just for themselves but for one another as well.
 - b. They loved and cared for one another.
 - c. They were willing to sacrifice everything to become a disciple of Christ and were willing to sacrifice financially to take care of their brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - d. They encouraged women to do their part in the Lord's vineyard.
 - e. And they spread the Gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world.
4. These are perfect examples of EVERY MEMBER of the body of Christ doing their part in the work of ministry to the edifying of the body of Christ.

- II. However, one of the biggest reasons for a lack of active participation by every member of the body of Christ is simply because many don't believe they have the ability to do the work of service.
 - A. Therefore, in the lesson this morning and in the final lesson of this series next Sunday morning, I want to focus on two specific areas:
 - 1. First, we need to understand that the Lord has provided a wide range of gifts within the body of Christ, all of which are needful.
 - 2. And second, you need to be able to identify YOUR particular talents and abilities – YOUR particular GIFTS – that will help this church reach the lost and strengthen your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - B. So let's begin looking at the DIVERSITY OF GIFTS in the Body of Christ.
 - 1. By DIVERSITY OF GIFTS, we're talking about the wide range of talents and abilities found in the body of Christ today – including talents and abilities in THIS congregation.
 - a. I personally believe this is an area where many churches fail. They fail to seek out or identify the talents and abilities of their members, and therefore, they fail to USE those talents and abilities to help the church grow numerically and spiritually.

- b. This not only stunts the growth of the church, it frustrates members who want to use their God-given talents and abilities in serving others.
2. Therefore, this morning we're going to be focusing our time on several points about diversity of function made by the apostle Paul in his letter to the churches at CORINTH and ROME.

BODY:

- I. In Paul's letters to the church at CORINTH and ROME, he addressed a number of issues confronting the church, including the issue of SPIRITUAL GIFTS.
 - A. Paul will later identify these spiritual gifts as gifts that were given through the Holy Spirit – gifts such as healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, just to mention a few.
 1. While we understand that THOSE GIFTS were given in a MIRACULOUS way through the laying on of the apostles hands, the PRINCIPLE of the church having diversity of gifts is still important for us today.
 2. Or, to put it another way, while we don't have gifts of healings, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and

interpretation of tongues in the church TODAY, we DO have people in the church whom God has blessed with unique talents and abilities that can be of benefit to THIS CHURCH just as much as THOSE SPIRITUAL GIFTS were to the church at Corinth some two-thousand years ago.

3. Therefore, we need to look at Paul's message to Corinth and Rome to learn more about how we should VIEW the diversity of talents and abilities among our members, and what we need to be doing to ENCOURAGE their use.
- B. When we turn to **1 Corinthians chapter 12**, we see that the apostle Paul begins by comparing the Lord's church to the human body, for the sake of illustrating the importance of each and every member of the church.
1. Paul begins by saying: **1 Corinthians 12:12** – *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*
 2. In fact, the members of the church at Corinth came from a wide range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds: **1 Corinthians 12:13-14** – *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all*

been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many.

- C. The apostle Paul told the brethren in ROME the same thing.
 - 1. **Romans 12:3-4** – *For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as we have many members in one body...*
 - 2. **Romans 12:5** – *so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

- D. The point Paul is attempting to make in these two letters is the similarity between the PHYSICAL BODY, which has many different members that are able to function in specific ways, and the BODY OF CHRIST – the CHURCH – which has many different members who are also able to perform various functions.
 - 1. However, the main purpose for making this comparison between the human body and the Lord's church is to show that not everyone is expected to function in the same way as everyone else.

2. Going back to **Romans 12:4**, Paul said: *For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function...*
3. Concerning the diversity of spiritual gifts in the church, Paul went on to say: **Romans 12:6-8** – *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*
 - a. Concerning the use of spiritual gifts, Paul said USE THEM!
 - b. In other words, USE whatever gift God has given you - *let us use it in our ministering. (Romans 12:7)*
 - c. Those spiritual gifts were given according to God's grace, therefore USE THEM!
4. Paul had a similar message to the saints in Corinth.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 12:27-28** – *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. 28 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

- b. Then Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions implying that not all members have the same function, nor is everyone expected to do the same thing as everyone else: **1**

Corinthians 12:29-30 – *Are all apostles? Are all prophets?*

Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? 30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

- 5. Paul wanted Christians of the first century church to understand that God gave spiritual gifts to certain specific people because **THEY** would be best suited to perform **THAT** specific task.
- 6. Therefore, since God is the one who **GAVE** this diversity of gifts in the church, He certainly doesn't expect everyone to be performing the same tasks.
 - a. Everyone needs to use the gift God has given **THEM** regardless of whether **THEY** think their particular gift is really all that important.
 - b. God simply wouldn't have given someone a gift **IF** He didn't think it was important to the growth and edification of the church, **NOR** would He have given someone a particular gift unless they were able to **USE IT** in **SOME** way to benefit others.

II. Peter and James, the Lord's brother, also have some inspired insights along this same line.

A. Peter exhorts his readers to use the gifts God has given them.

1. **1 Peter 4:10-11** – *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

a. In other words, Peter is saying **WHATEVER GIFT** you have received, **USE IT to MINISTER** to others, as a good steward of the grace which God has bestowed on you.

b. Minister, or serve, with the ability that God has given you so that God is glorified through Jesus Christ.

2. But if you **DON'T** use the gift God has given you, then consider the consequences.

a. If you don't use your gift others are not going to be served.

b. And if you don't use your gift with the ability that God has given you, then God is not glorified.

- B. James, on the other hand, addresses those who DESIRE to become TEACHERS of the Word, and issues a warning that suggests not everyone is suited for this task.
1. **James 3:1** - *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*
 2. Some see James' statement as being in contradiction to that of the Hebrew writer who said: **Hebrews 5:12** – *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God...*
 - a. Don't misunderstand what James is saying here. He is NOT trying to discourage people from teaching.
 - b. Rather, he is warning those who WOULD BE teachers to understand how SERIOUS their job is.
 - c. He says those of us who teach will receive a stricter judgment – meaning we will not only be judged by WHAT we teach, but also by HOW we teach it.
 - d. Anyone who would dare stand before their brothers and sisters in Christ, or who would sit down to teach an unbeliever, BETTER BE PROPERLY PREPARED.
 - e. God is not going to be pleased with someone who doesn't take the responsibility of teaching others seriously.

- f. This means they NOT ONLY need to have a THOROUGH knowledge of God's Word, they also need to PRESENT IT in such a way that it will do the most good.
 - 3. So in essence, everyone should be able to sit down with someone else and share the message of Christ with them. But not everyone is expected to be a teacher in the Lord's church.
- III. What happens when we fail to appreciate the fact that everyone has unique gifts – unique talents and abilities – that can be used to serve others and glorify God through Christ?
- A. I believe two things occur when we fail to appreciate the fact that not everyone has the same talents and abilities.
 - 1. First, when members fail to understand that not everyone has the same gifts, and are led to believe that everyone should be serving in the same way, people are forced to be what they are not – nor can ever be.
 - a. In essence, it's setting many members of the church up for failure.
 - b. They believe they MUST fulfill a certain function in the body of Christ, and they try to the best of their ability, but they lack the

God-given talents and abilities to fulfill that function in a way that truly edifies the body and brings glory to God and Christ.

- c. And so, when they fail, they become discouraged and feel there is really NOTHING they are suited for.
 - d. They simply give up.
2. The second thing that happens when members fail to understand that not everyone has the same gifts, is that the body ITSELF – the local church – is handicapped through the service of those who are simply NOT qualified or equipped to serve in that particular capacity.
- a. In Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth he summed up the proper use of SPIRITUAL GIFTS with this admonition: **1 Corinthians 14:26** – *Let all things be done for edification.*
 - b. That's the bottom line. Everything done in the church should be done with the goal in mind of edifying the church – of spiritually encouraging and strengthening the members of the local congregation.
 - c. When someone is given a work to do, or a service to perform in the church, and they are not qualified to do that work or perform that service, the church is not properly encouraged spiritually or strengthened.

- d. I'm sure someone is going to say, "Well, how else is someone going to KNOW if they have the talents and abilities to perform a service, OR how are they ever going to DEVELOP talent or abilities if they are never given an opportunity to TRY?"
- e. Perhaps we need to provide opportunities for people to realize or develop their gifts in ANOTHER SETTING – perhaps in training classes, or in a setting OTHER THAN the worship assembly.
- f. For example, this is one of the reasons we encourage the men of this congregation to lead songs, to lead in prayer, to stand before the group and read scriptures or give short talks so that they can discover the areas of ministry where their unique gifts are best suited.
- g. Unfortunately, we don't always get every man to participate (they probably WILL after this sermon – LOL).

IV. So, what conclusions can we draw from all this?

A. I believe we need to understand that EVERY GIFT – every talent and ability – is crucial to the proper operation of the body.

1. **1 Corinthians 12:15-20** – *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16*

And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

- a. No one can say that they or their unique gifts are not important – the apostle Paul says otherwise.
- b. There is no place in the body of Christ for low self-esteem among members who try to convince themselves and others that there is nothing they can do.
- c. Remember, it takes the proper working of each individual part for the body of Christ to grow and edify itself in love. **(cf. Ephesians 4:16)**
- d. That means YOU! YOU are a part of THIS congregation that needs to be using the very precious and unique gifts God has given you so that others HERE will be strengthened and edified.

- B. But not only do we need to understand that EVERY GIFT is crucial to the proper operation of the body, we also need to become aware of all the ways we can serve this church.
1. That's going to be the focus of our last lesson in this brief series of lessons.
 - a. Since MY responsibility as an evangelist and teacher is to help equip you to perform the works of service in this church, YOU need to DISCOVER those hidden talents and abilities that are needed to help this church grow spiritually and numerically.
 - b. And once you discover your unique gifts, then we need to set about doing all we can to help you USE your talents and abilities to edify the saints, to help reach the lost, and to ultimately glorify God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
 2. So, in the final lesson I plan to point out a number of areas where you can serve – areas that specifically and uniquely suited for men, as well as areas that are specifically and uniquely suited for women.
 - a. Everyone in the congregation will receive a card that will list all the works of service you can perform in this church – some of which we are already doing, and others we need to be doing.

- b. And you will be given a chance to discover which ones are more suited for your own unique God-given gifts.

CONCLUSION:

- I. I hope I've been able to stir up your zeal through some of the points I've made in this lesson.
 - A. Most importantly, I hope you are beginning to realize that you DO have gifts that God has blessed you with that can benefit this church in areas where your unique gift is most needed.
 - 1. We are a body that has many members, and not all the members have the same function.
 - 2. But never forget that EVERY UNIQUE GIFT is crucial to the proper function of the body.
 - 3. That means there is not only a PLACE for you in this church, there is a NEED for you to use your talents and abilities as a blessing to us all.
 - B. Are you a thriving, working member of the body, or are you still sitting on the sidelines wondering what you can do?
 - 1. If you're like some, you probably feel there isn't anything of REAL VALUE that you can offer this church in the way of service.

2. I hope I can help you discover some areas of service that could really use someone like you.
- II. However, as we bring this lesson to a close, I want you to consider a statement Jesus made regarding servanthood.
- A. When two of the Lord's disciples were hoping Jesus would set one on His right hand and the other on His left when He came into His kingdom, the rest of the disciples became outraged.
1. And so, Jesus said: **Mark 10:42-45** – *"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. 44 And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve , and to give His life a ransom for many."*
 - a. Jesus said greatness in the kingdom is not in being a RULER, but in being a SERVANT – and those who desire to achieve greatness in the kingdom shall become a SLAVE to all.
 - b. This great truth is seen in the life of Jesus – Who came, not to BE served, but to SERVE, and to give His life as a ransom.
 2. Are you serving or waiting to be served?

a. The only way you can truly be a servant of Jesus Christ is to first be IN the body of Christ – the Lord’s church – by coming to Him in complete faith and obedience, repenting of your sins, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of your past sins.

(1). By doing this, the Lord will add you to His church.

b. But if you’ve done that, and yet there are things in your life that are standing in your way of being a TRUE servant – ministering to the needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ, or of helping to take the message of the gospel to others – then do whatever you need to do to remove those obstacles.

(1). If they are sins which you haven’t confessed to God, then do that today.

(2). If they are burdens you need help bearing, then let that be know so that we can pray with you and for you.