

# **The Measure of a New Testament Church**

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## **Lesson 1: What Is a New Testament Church?**

### **Introduction**

One of the difficulties of human communication is that the same word conveys different meanings to different people. For example, the word 'peace' means one thing to an American and another to the communist. Let's take another word, 'snow.' To our children, this word stimulates associations which are very positive. They think first of no school and secondly of playing outside with sleds and snowballs and coming inside to a warm fire and hot chocolate. To us snow may mean getting up early, hazardous driving conditions, cancelled appointments and plans, and dead batteries. The word 'church' has all kinds of associations to various people. Most people would associate this term with Sunday, stained glass and sermons.

The term 'New Testament church' is no exception. By and large this expression is as meaningless to the unbeliever as a 'left-handed monkey wrench' is to most of our wives. Even within the Christian community there is great variance as to what this term connotes. In the denominational and Bible church circles, it probably conveys the idea of Bible-believing, or New Testament-teaching. But if being a New Testament church is a goal to which we strive, we must surely have a more concise definition in mind. It is for this reason I would like to attempt to define what a New Testament church should be. In our first message, we shall attempt an overview or broad definition, and in subsequent messages we shall be much more specific.

We will begin by describing the most generally accepted element of a New Testament church, that of its doctrinal foundation.

#### **A. A New Testament church is a church which derives its doctrine from the New Testament.**

We should all agree that a New Testament church is a church which believes and teaches the doctrines of the New Testament. Surely we are going to have some differences of opinion in some rather disputed areas of theology. We may not all agree as to the precise timing of the rapture with respect to other events, for example. There may be differences of opinion as to the exact extent of the atonement, but at least in my mind this does not make a church any less New Testament.

There must, however, be agreement in what are the so-called 'fundamentals of the faith.' By this I refer to the doctrines of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, the virgin birth, the literal, bodily resurrection of our Lord; the substitutionary atonement, the second coming of Christ, and the doctrine of the trinity. Without adherence to these fundamentals, no church should have the right to call itself New Testament.

If this were the only measure of a New Testament church, then every church which is orthodox in its doctrinal statement could be legitimately identified as a New Testament church, but there is much more that is necessary than this.

#### **B. A New Testament church is a church which is structured and governed in accordance with New Testament principles and practices.**

Many churches which are dogmatic about the New Testament being its only authority in matters of 'faith and practice' suddenly become pragmatic and relative in the matter of church doctrine and practice, formally known by its Neiman Marcus label, 'ecclesiology.'

Some would be so bold as to say that the New Testament sheds no light on the life and practice of the church in the twentieth century. For example, Donald G. Miller states: "No particular structure of church life is divinely ordained."<sup>1</sup>

Again he writes:

Any form ... which the Holy Spirit can inhabit and to which He may impart the life of Christ, must be accepted as valid for the church. As all forms of life adapt themselves to their environment, so does the Life of Christ by His Spirit in the church.<sup>2</sup>

Few, if any, conservative Christian scholars would dare make such a sweeping statement as Mr. Miller, but while insisting that the New Testament is to be our guide in church polity and practice, there is little agreement as to just how this works out and to what principles and practices of the New Testament we are obliged to follow. A godly and highly respected church leader, Dr. Gene Getz has written:

He (Paul) was 'a free man'—not locked into patterns and structures, either in communication or in organization and administration.<sup>3</sup>

Further, he has written,

... Paul was not consistent in the instruction he gave regarding the appointment of elders and deacons. ... It is impossible, of course, to arrive at conclusive reasons as to why there is a disparity in Paul's approach to church leadership from church to church. But, is this not part of the genius of the New Testament? Once again we see freedom in form and structure, means and methods, patterns and programs.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Getz is not saying that the New Testament gives us no principles for church life, for later on in his book he enumerates several. The difficulty that I have with this kind of approach is this: How do we distinguish between what is binding upon us in the New Testament and what is not? The answer which Dr. Getz and others would give is that we must separate New Testament practices from New Testament principles. We must adhere to the principles and follow the practices as best as we see fit.

All of this is appealing, except for the distressing fact that Paul equated his practices with the principles that he taught:

I exhort you therefore, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in

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<sup>1</sup> Donald G. Miller, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, p. 82, as quoted by Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109, 110.

every church (1 Corinthians 4:16,17).

Unlike so many of us, Paul practiced what he preached and he preached what he practiced. Paul could instruct his readers to imitate his ways because they conformed with what he taught. His ways were not culturally oriented, but rather universally practiced 'everywhere and in every church.' How, then can we distinguish what Paul did, or apostolic practice, from what he taught, apostolic principle?

This raises a very logical and legitimate question. Are you saying, then, that I am to believe that the truly New Testament church should carry out every practice recorded in the New Testament? Should we wash feet and greet one another with a holy kiss? Should we meet in the Temple or in private homes? Should we do away with full-time ministers and all make tents? Let me suggest some practical (and I hope biblical) guidelines for discerning what practices were binding in the New Testament times and are binding upon us today as well. The answer to these four questions should help us to discern what New Testament practices we should persist in following today.

**1. Was the practice in question universally and consistently followed in the churches of the New Testament?** Those things which Timothy was sent to remind the Corinthians of were those things which Paul practiced and preached 'everywhere in every church' (1 Corinthians 4:16,17). Such was also the case with the head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11:16 and with the women remaining silent in the church meeting (1 Corinthians 14:33,34).<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the principle of the silence and subjection of the woman in the church meeting cannot be thrust aside as culturally oriented, no matter how devout, sincere or well-intentioned the followers of the liberation movement may be.

On the other hand foot washing was not practiced by the church at all. It was a lesson taught to the disciples by our Lord as an example of humility. Surely we need to learn humility and to serve one another, but unless the craze of wearing no shoes or socks continues, such would be unnecessary. Nowhere in the Scriptures do we see any evidence of the New Testament churches continuing this practice as some kind of ordinance.

The same thing can be said for meeting in houses. Although the church met in various private homes (Romans 16:3-16; Philemon 2, etc.), it also met at the Temple, in various synagogues for a time, and in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). We must conclude that the church met wherever it was convenient to do so, and that no one kind of meeting place was superior to another.

**2. Is the New Testament practice directly related to a principle which we would violate by neglecting that practice?** The New Testament churches knew nothing of having one man called the pastor who was the head of the church. Was this simply a practice of the ancient church which has long since been abolished for a new and better way of church government? Behind this practice of plurality rule by elders is the principle of the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is to have the preeminence in the church (Colossians 1:18; cf. Matthew 23:8-10). In addition, there is

<sup>5</sup> I agree with the rendering of the New International Version which includes the end of verse 33 with verse 34.

the principle of the 'priesthood of every believer' (1 Peter 2:5,9) which is cast aside by the distinction of laity and clergy.

Conversely, there is no principle underlying the meeting of the church in private homes, other than that of practicality. There is no principle which dictates that the church should meet on Saturday evening, as some would suggest was done in the New Testament churches. Rather we are told in Scripture that we should not compel anyone to regard one day above another (Romans 14:5,6; Colossians 2:16,17).

**3. Is the practice in question a right or a responsibility?** Paul often refused to be financially supported by those to whom he ministered. Since Paul 'made his tents' does this necessitate that we do likewise? If Paul was obliged to work, that is if it was a responsibility, then we should follow his example. However in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 Paul clearly established the right of every minister of the gospel to be supported by those to whom he ministered. Paul chose to forego the right of personal support in order to preach the gospel without offense to any. We must not compel others to do what Paul did voluntarily as a matter of Christian liberty.

**4. Is there any higher principle involved, which might override a New Testament practice?** Frequently in the New Testament we are instructed to 'Greet one another with a holy kiss' (e.g. Romans 16:16). As I have said previously there is a great deal of difference between a 'holy kiss' and a 'Hollywood kiss.' Paul is not suggesting that one of the brethren greet one of the women with a back-bending, spine-tingling embrace. In our culture, however, I am not certain that any type of kiss could be understood by those outside the household of God. The Scriptures instruct us to 'avoid any appearance of evil' (1 Thessalonians 5:22), and greeting with a kiss in the church may well appear evil to some.

In a case such as this there is a completely acceptable alternative, I believe. We must first ask ourselves what the principle behind this instruction is. I would understand it to be that Christians should give outward evidence of their deep and abiding love and affection for one another. In addition the Scriptures teach us that our relationships between members of the opposite sex should be in good taste and beyond criticism (cf. 1 Timothy 5:2). Since greeting with a kiss may bring reproach to the name of our Lord we may carry out the principle of warmth and affection by an acceptable form of greeting, such as the handshake. J. B. Phillips catches the force of Paul's instruction when he renders the expression,

Give one another a hearty handshake all round for my sake (Romans 16:16).

What are these principles which distinguish a New Testament church from those which fall short? Let me briefly mention a few, while suggesting the application of these principles to church polity and practice.<sup>6</sup>

**(a) There is only one church, or the unity of the church.** The universal church consists of every believer in Jesus Christ from the death of Christ to the rapture.

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<sup>6</sup> The careful student will want to study, *The Principles of the New Testament Church* by Bill McRae (Dallas: Believers Chapel, n.d.).

Although we speak of the Baptist Church and the Lutheran Church and so on there is only one church. It is the obligation of the local church to demonstrate this unity, not by setting itself apart as distinct from other biblical churches, but by identifying with them. Some of us act as though if a letter were written to the church in Dallas it would be delivered only to whatever church we happen to belong to.

**(b) Every Believer in Jesus Christ is a member of the church of Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:27.** Many churches refuse to allow an individual to partake of Communion who are not ‘members’ of their church. We should accept any believer into our fellowship without discrimination of any kind, save for disciplinary reasons, Romans 15:7.

**(c) Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.** As the Head of the church, Jesus Christ should have the pre-eminence. There should be no man who exalts himself or allows himself to become the function ‘head’ of the church. This would necessitate rule by a plurality (e.g. Matthew 23:8-12; also note that in the New Testament ‘elders’ is plural: Philippians 1:1; Acts 20:17,28<sup>7</sup>).

**(d) Every believer in Jesus Christ is a priest, 1 Peter 2:5,9.** The Old Testament distinction of laity and clergy has been abolished. The New Testament church cannot allow these laity-clergy distinctions to linger on.

**(e) The church of Jesus Christ is holy, 1 Corinthians 3:17.** This holiness must be maintained by church discipline, cf. Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:5, etc.

**(f) In the church, as in marriage, the man is to reflect the headship of Christ and the woman is privileged to portray the submission of the church to her Lord.** Men do this by assuming the leadership role, while women refrain from leadership in the church meetings (Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 14:34-36; 1 Timothy 2:9-15).

I want to be the first to emphasize that the Scriptures leave a great deal of room for variation in the application of these principles. We should not expect New Testament churches to be carbon copies of one another. The Scriptures also are very informative in what they do not tell us. It would have been very comforting to the leadership of our assembly had the Scriptures spelled out precisely how to recognize elders, but such was not the case. Principles not only demand a latitude in application, they also require faith in application.

**C. A New Testament church is one that expresses the life of Christ in a tangible way.**

I have a very good friend who some time ago attended what was described as a New Testament meeting of the church. In terms of its form and structure it would commonly be known as a New Testament church. That particular meeting left much to be desired (as will happen in any church). As he left the meeting my friend remarked, “I don’t know what that was, but it wasn’t what turned the world upside down.”

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<sup>7</sup> In 1 Timothy 3:2 the use of the singular, ‘an overseer’ is a ‘generic use’ of the singular, speaking of the elders as a class, as we would say, “The fox is a wily animal.” Cf. 1 Timothy 5:9, ‘a widow.’

What my friend observed is a very significant point, which is simply this: You can have all the forms of a New Testament church and be absolutely lifeless and useless. This is why I must include this third characteristic of a New Testament church: The truly New Testament church is one that not only maintains the forms of New Testament ecclesiology (church doctrine and practice), but also continues the function of the New Testament church. A New Testament church must be New Testament in both form and function.

There are many ways to evaluate this function. Dr. Gene Getz, in his book *The Measure of a Church*, suggests that we evaluate on the basis of three essential ingredients, *faith, hope, and love*. Surely these are essential to a New Testament Church. But I would like to suggest a somewhat simpler basis of evaluation. I would put forth the standard of our Lord Jesus Himself. He surely is the 'measure of a man' as well as the 'measure of a church.'

The church is frequently referred to as the 'body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:12ff.). This is no mere metaphor, it is a wonderful reality. When the writer of Acts, Dr. Luke, introduced this book to Theophilus, he referred to his first work, the gospel of Luke, as recording 'all that Jesus began to do and teach' (Acts 1:1). The inference to me is crystal clear. All that Jesus began to do and to teach the church, His body, continued (not only in Acts, but today!) to do and to teach. The function of the church in its most simplistic form is to continue to live out the life of Christ in the world. In the next several weeks we are going to study what this means in specific terms, but suffice it to say that for the present moment, no church lives up to its New Testament standard unless it is evident that Christ is alive and well on planet earth so to speak. We are to bring to the world the good news of the gospel, we are to teach and train as did our Lord, we are to minister to the physical and material needs of both saved and lost men and women. We are to worship the Father and bring honor and glory to His name.

What, then, is a New Testament church? It is a church that looks to the inspired Word of God, not only for its doctrines as they relate to the individual in His relationship with God, but also for the principles by which the church is to be governed and carry on its task in the world. Beyond this, the New Testament church is the church which lives out the life of our Lord through its various members who make up the body.

### **Applications**

The first thing I would say by way of application is that we ought not be too quick to claim for ourselves that we are a truly New Testament church. If a New Testament church must have the function as well as the form of the New Testament church, we had better be careful about claiming to have attained to this. A New Testament church has New Testament life and vitality and growth. None of us has arrived to this standard I fear. Being a New Testament church is like attaining to 'the fulness of the stature of Christ,' something to strive for, but nothing to boast of.

Second, and this will sound heretical, I would not want to recommend that you attend a church simply because it claimed to be New Testament in its organizational structure. If I had to choose between a supposedly New Testament church which had no life, no

vitality, no ministry, no outreach or vision, and a church which was faithful to the Scriptures in every way but in the matter of church structure, but had a vibrant ministry, I would not linger long over a decision. A church without New Testament principles, but with New Testament life is more New Testament than one with only the proper forms.

Finally, there is an ever-present danger for those of us who are a part of what are called New Testament churches to be puffed up with pride. I cannot help but be reminded of the carnality of the Corinthians in a similar fashion:

Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul,' and 'I of Apollos,' and 'I of Cephas,' and 'I of Christ' (1 Corinthians 1:12).

Now all of us would agree about the carnality of those who sided with Paul, Apollos, and Peter. But what was wrong with those who sided with Christ? How could they be wrong? They were wrong, not so much in their doctrine as in their attitudes. So, also, we may look down our noses at those who say, "I am a Baptist" or "I am a Lutheran," and we smugly think to ourselves, "But I go to a New Testament church." God keep us from this kind of pride.

## **Lesson 2: Christian Unity (Ephesians 4:1-16)**

### **Introduction**

We have said that a New Testament church is one that derives its doctrines from the New Testament. Further, a New Testament church derives its principles and practices for church life from the New Testament. Finally, a New Testament church is one which exhibits the life of Jesus Christ to the world.

To further pursue this last point, let us be more specific and suggest four key elements which can serve as the 'measure of a New Testament church.' The first of these, and the one to which this lesson will be devoted, is what might be called the measure of 'body life.' No passage deals with this fundamental to church life more clearly than that of Ephesians 4:1-16.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

This passage can be logically divided into three parts, all of which relate to the central theme of Christian unity. The first six verses deal with the fundamental unity which exists between all believers in Jesus Christ.

## **Fundamental Christian Unity Is to Be Preserved (4:1-6)**

This unity of which Paul wrote is not one which the Christian needs to create, but one which already exists and must be diligently preserved (vs. 3). It is based upon our sharing life in one body, the universal church, the body of Christ (vs. 5, cf. 2:15,16). All Christians are sealed, possessed, and indwelt by the same Spirit and look forward to the same hope (vs. 5, cf. 1:18). We possess one Lord, that is, one Supreme Commander, one common faith (one system of fundamental truth) held by all Christians, and one baptism (i.e. spirit baptism, cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

Unity, although it can not be created by the Christian, must be preserved by him. This is to be diligently pursued (vs. 3) by an attitude of humility (seeing ourselves as God does, unworthy recipients of His grace). Our humble spirit should be demonstrated by a gentleness and graciousness in our dealings with others. This gentleness should be longsuffering, patiently enduring prolonged irritation. The love which we have for one another should prompt us to put up with the eccentricities of our fellow-Christians. As Ironside put it, “lovingly putting up with all that is disagreeable in other people.”

## **Unity in Diversity (4:7-11)**

Unity does not imply uniformity. It does not mean that all Christians will think alike or perform identical ministries. It does imply a common purpose and interdependence within the body of Christ.

To every individual within the body of Christ is given a particular capacity for ministry. This capacity (or capacities) is commonly called a ‘spiritual gift.’ Although the particular function involved may not appear to be particularly ‘spiritual,’ the outcome is spiritual benefit to the body of Christ. For example, there is seemingly little difference between writing a check to the mortgage company and one to say Dallas Seminary. The difference is that in giving to the seminary, men are being trained to teach and preach which will bring growth and blessing to many Christians. The man who has the gift of helps may fix the washing machine of one of the saints, not only meeting a very real need but saving money which can be used in the Lord’s work and bringing real encouragement and blessing to the one helped.

Since my intention here is not to emphasize the important subject of spiritual gifts, and since we will deal with that subject later in this series, let me simply summarize the major contributions of this text relative to spiritual gifts in general.

1. Spiritual gifts are given to every Christian: “... to each one of us was given ...” (vs. 7).
2. Spiritual gifts are a gift of grace: “... grace was given ...” (vs. 7).
3. Spiritual gifts are a token of the victory of our Lord over Satan, wrought by His incarnation, work of atonement, resurrection and ascension (vss. 7-10).
4. Spiritual gifts are not given primarily for the benefit of the individual, but for the edification of the entire body (vss. 12-16).

5. Spiritual gifts are not contradictory to Christian unity, they are complimentary to it (vs. 16). Calvin put it this way: “No member of the body of Christ is endowed with such Perfection as to be able, without the assistance of others, to supply his own necessities.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul did not deal with all of the spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4. Rather he concentrated upon those gifts which we might call equipping gifts. These gifts are the gift of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher (vs. 11). Apostles and prophets were the men who laid the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20; 3:5). In the most restricted sense an apostle was one who had seen our Lord (1 Corinthians 9:1) and who had been with our Lord during His earthly ministry (Acts 1:20-22). These men were given the task of proclaiming the terms of salvation and establishing the primitive church. Prophets were those men through whom God spoke directly. Sometimes the revelation would pertain to future things (e.g. Acts 11: 27-28), but not always (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:1-5). Although in a lesser sense there are men today who are instrumental in establishing churches and proclaiming God’s word, we believe that apostles and prophets are no longer needed or to be expected (cf. Hebrews 2:3,4; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

Evangelists are those whom God has enabled to proclaim the gospel in such a way that men respond in greater numbers. These gifts are still very necessary and still very important today. Pastor-teachers<sup>9</sup> are vital today as well as they are gifted not only to communicate the truths of Scripture, but are also qualified to pastor the flock of God. While teaching communicates the principles of God’s word, pastoring applies it to the lives of individuals in specific situations. Pastor-teachers are teaching shepherds given by God to His church. Someone has aptly compared the evangelist to an obstetrician and the pastor-teacher to a pediatrician. While the evangelist is instrumental in bringing about the numerical growth of the church, the pastor-teacher is more concerned with the spiritual growth of the church.

### **Diversity of Gifts Leads to Unity (4:12-16)**

Far from undermining the fundamental unity existing between individual Christians, the diversity of spiritual gifts enhances, even necessitates unity. While in verses 1-6 the basis for Christian endeavor was fundamental unity, in verses 12-16 functional unity is the goal of Christian endeavor. We might call the unity of verses 1-6 positional and that of verses 12-16 practical.

A decade ago the vast majority of churches would have virtually stopped at verse 11, thinking that the work of the ministry was the work of the clergy. Thank God many churches have had the courage to study and apply the remaining verses of this section.

The immediate goal of the ministry of gifted evangelists and pastor-teachers is expressed in verse 12: “for the equipping of the saints.” The Greek word rendered ‘equipping’ is a very interesting term. It is used with the idea of equipping ... of the

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<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, as quoted by Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> For a defense of the position which takes pastor-teacher as one gift rather than two, cf. Wm. Hendricksen, *New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 197, fn. 113.

fitting out of a ship ... of the fitting out of an army ... of developing certain parts of the body by exercise. It is also used of restoring or putting something in order ... of mending nets and preparing them for another day's fishing (Matthew 4:21) ... of pacifying a city torn by faction ... of restoring a limb that was dislocated (cf. 'be made complete,' NASV, 1 Corinthians 1:10).

In both senses of this word the pastor-teacher is like a coach. He strives to equip his men for winning ball games. He endeavors to tighten up flabby muscles and to train men to play well. In addition he must also work in such a way as to get the men playing as a team. Petty squabbles and differences must be dealt with. Men must be united in spirit and working toward a common goal. Such is the responsibility of the pastor-teacher as well. Shaping up the saints and getting individual members of the body of Christ to work together harmoniously.

The saints are equipped for ministry. What an amazing reversal has occurred. Christians are often not turning the world upside down, but the Scriptures upside down. This passage tells us that the ministry is the saint's work, not the preacher's. We say that the preacher is 'in the ministry' but Paul says everyone else is.

What, then, is the ministry to which all the so-called laity are called? In general terms the answer is given in verse 12: "... to the building up of the body of Christ." The ministry to which every Christian is called is to build up the body. How this is accomplished is described in verse 16: The body is caused to grow when every individual member of that body carries out its assigned task to the best of its God-given ability. This is where the other gifts, not listed in verse 11 by Paul, fit in. If evangelists and pastor-teachers are equipping gifts, all the rest are serving gifts or ministry gifts, helping, administration, giving, and so on.

If the immediate goal for those gifted as pastor-teachers is equipping the saints to minister to the needs of the body, the ultimate goal of all ministry in the church is given in verse 13:

"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

**1. The ultimate measure of maturity is the standard of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The ultimate goal for all ministry in the body of Christ is maturity. The measure of that maturity is suggested by several standards in our text (vs. 13). To be fully mature is to be Christ-like. We must conclude, therefore, that complete maturity in this life is never attained. We must also realize that we should never gauge our maturity by comparing ourselves with anyone other than our Lord.

**2. The second measure of maturity is that of stability.**

"As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (vs. 14).

The stability to which Paul referred is being so well-grounded in doctrine that we can

recognize and avoid those who teach out of impure motives and by questionable methods, and reject their teachings. Immaturity is equated with instability, wavering every time some new teaching is introduced.

### **3. The third measure of maturity is what we might call loving truthfulness.**

“... speaking the truth in Love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him ...”  
(vs. 15).

The term rendered ‘speaking the truth’ is literally ‘truthing.’ It can mean ‘holding to the truth’ or ‘walking in truth’ as well as ‘speaking the truth.’ We are surely to hold or adhere to what is truth in a loving way, just as we should speak the truth in love. Neither rendering can be completely isolated from the other, since both are true.

### **4. One final measure of maturity is unity.**

“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God ...” (vs. 13a).

Our unity grows out of our mutual comprehension of those doctrines which constitute ‘the faith’ and out of our ever-increasing intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ (vs. 13).

A couple of weeks ago it came time for me to go to the doctor for a check-up. I know that physicals are not the most delightful experience, but they are a necessity. I cannot help but see an analogy between determining the health of the church, the body of Christ, with the physical exam with which we are all so familiar.

The doctor wants to check for a kind of stability. He wishes to know if there have been any dramatic changes, such as loss of appetite, loss of sleep, or significant gains or loss of weight. He also, when giving a check-up to a child, looks for regular healthy growth. But most significant he checks to see that every part of the body is working and working in co-ordination with the rest of the body. The doctor looked in my eyes and ears, checked even my hair, he poked here and there, hammered my knees and checked my toes. What he could not see from outside, he x-rayed or tested in some other way.

The first measure of a church is, in my estimation, a check of what has been called its ‘body life.’ We are to some extent arriving at the goal of a New Testament church when those who have the equipping gifts are doing just that and when the saints are carrying out the work of the ministry. To the extent that any member is not involved or is failing to carry out his task in the body, the body is in poor health.

One of the great concerns of our elders is that we provide the environment, encouragement and opportunities for each of you to fulfill your responsibilities to the body of Jesus Christ. I think we would want to confess that we have attempted to do far too much ourselves and spent too little time equipping and encouraging you to assume your responsibilities to the body.

## **Conclusion and Applications**

If we are to take this passage in Ephesians chapter 4 seriously, there are a number of specific applications. Let me begin by making some to myself.

### **1. The function of the pastor-teacher is to equip people for the ministry.**

There are two extremes for those who have this gift to avoid. The one is trying to do all of the 'ministry' ourselves. If we do not equip you to minister, our ministry is a failure. The second extreme is to sit in our offices all day long and refuse to do anything but study. You cannot be a pastor in a locked study with the phone off the hook. You cannot equip people for ministry without giving them the example to follow. No wonder Paul could instruct others to follow his example. May God give the elders and others at Community Bible Chapel the wisdom to keep those of us with the gift of pastor-teacher walking the tight rope of balance between these two extremes.

**2. The goal of our teaching should be maturity, growth and unity.** I have a dreaded feeling in the pit of my stomach that much of our teaching does not create greater unity among all the saints, but further divides us. That is probably because we have been majoring on the minors. God keep us from harping on our 'distinctives' and neglecting the matters which determine one's spiritual destiny.

Now let me make a few suggestions as to how this text applies to your life.

**1. The work of the ministry is in your hands, not in 'the minister's.'** You should insist that neither I nor anyone else hinder you from carrying out your part of the ministry by trying to do everything. You should understand when we who are pastor-teachers fail to do something for you which others expect their pastor to do. You should defend those who are pastor-teachers when they are criticized for failing (or refusing) to do what many expect of 'the pastor.'

**2. We are dreadfully deficient in our expression of Christian unity, not just within the church, but between churches which have a like faith as ours.** In our effort to set our church or our doctrinal position apart as the New Testament way we have also created unnecessary and harmful divisions with those who are of the household of faith.

**3. The Sunday meeting of the church is not designed for ministry so much as it is for the equipping of the saints for ministry and the expression of worship to our God.** I would go even further to suggest that the ministry will not even be done primarily in the 'ministry group' meetings, but hopefully within the context of the ministry group all during the week.

**4. Find out your place in the local church and get involved.** Let me suggest some benefits of personal involvement in the work of the ministry as Paul defined ministry.

First, there is the benefit to the body of Jesus Christ.

Second, there is the satisfaction and fulfillment of doing what God designed and created you to do.

Third, there is the growth which you will experience as a vital part of the body and from making use of the truth which you have learned (cf. Mark 4:24,25).

Fourth, there is the joy of being able to see God at work. When our Lord Jesus turned the water into wine in John chapter two, it was only those who were involved by filling

the water pots who knew what our Lord had done (John 2:9).

Finally, there is fellowship and intimacy in working with other Christians which cannot be experienced in any other way.

## **Lesson 3: The Importance of Fellowship in a New Testament Church**

*Taught by Bob Gilliam*

Biblical fellowship is God's revealed method for the outworking of His will through the church.

### **Introduction**

Poor communication has been the plague of mankind ever since the tower of Babel. Such statements as the following reveal that we face problems when trying to communicate to one another: "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

We can sometimes be misunderstood because of mispronunciations as when Howard Hendrick's child told a friend that his father taught in a "cemetery." Sometimes sound-alike phrases are misunderstood as with the child in a Christian school who was asked to draw a picture depicting the hymn "Gladly the Cross I'd Bear" and instead drew a picture of Gladly, the cross-eyed bear. But if we have problems understanding the concepts of each other, that is nothing compared to the problems we encounter understanding the concepts of God, for His thoughts are not our thoughts, they are foreign to us.

Now, God has given us His thoughts in the Bible and explained them carefully, but as time has passed, they have become "greek to us" and we have warped His thoughts and reverted to our own practices concerning His word. One such concept that has been especially warped in its biblical meaning is the concept of Christian fellowship. Today, churches have fellowship halls, fellowship dinners, and fellowship retreats, but very few have real fellowship. Yet for a church that seeks to be guided in principle and practice by the New Testament, fellowship is very important.

This morning, I hope each of you will learn that biblical fellowship is God's method for the outworking of His will through the church. In order for you to understand this, we will have to discover first, what true fellowship really is, second, why fellowship is important in a New Testament church, and finally, how each one of us can practice fellowship here at Community Bible Chapel.

### **The Biblical Meaning of Fellowship**

As we go back into history and dig deep into the original languages of the Bible, we will discover seven significant facts that help us to understand God's intended meaning of the word, fellowship.

**The first fact concerns the meaning of the Greek root.** Our English word, "fellowship" is the translation of the Greek word, "*koinonia*." This Greek word is derived

from the root, “*koinos*,” which was a prefix in ancient Greek. If you were to add this prefix to words meaning “living,” “owning a purse,” “a dispute,” and “mother,” you would get words meaning “living in community together,” “owning a purse in common,” “a public dispute,” and “having a mother in common.” So we see that the root of the word, “fellowship,” means “to hold something in common.”

**Our second fact relates to the usage of the word, “fellowship.”** The Greek word, “*koinonia*,” was used to describe corporations, labor guilds, partners in a law firm, and the most intimate of marriage relationships. From the usage of the word, we can conclude that fellowship is a word denoting a relationship that is dependent on more than one individual. It is an interdependent relationship.

**A third fact is that “fellowship” was never used to describe man’s relationship to God before the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell the church.** It is an exclusively post-pentecost relationship.

**A fourth fact about the meaning of “fellowship” can be gleaned by comparing it to its New Testament synonyms.** These are words which have overlapping but not the identical meaning of *koinonia*. The four synonyms of *koinonia* in the New Testament are *philos*, which means “related by love for outward characteristics”; *hetairos*, meaning a sharer in a common enterprise; *sunergos*, meaning a fellow-worker; and *metochos*, a participant. Each of these words denotes a unity which is expressed outwardly. This is true of fellowship but by contrast, fellowship is also an inner unity. This inner aspect of fellowship may be seen in verses such as 1 Corinthians 1:9:

God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Here, fellowship primarily focuses on our spiritual unity with Christ, an inner relationship. I suspect that Philemon.6, 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Philippians 2:1 also emphasize the inner relationship which is at the root of fellowship.

**Fifth, however, we must note that fellowship does not stop with being an inner unity for it is primarily an action word!** *Koinonia* is used nineteen times in the New Testament and in addition to being translated as “fellowship” it is also translated by the words, “contribution,” “sharing,” and “participation.” A close study of the usage of this word shows that action is always included in its meaning. Fellowship, you see, is not just being together, it is doing together! This is a point almost universally ignored by Christian groups today.

**Our sixth observation concerning the meaning of “fellowship” is that it is a unique relationship with Christ.** We have a relationship of being “in Christ.” We also have a relationship of being “a part of Christ’s body.” Fellowship is neither. It is not “being in” or “being part” but it is “doing with” Christ. It is our partnership with Christ in fulfilling God’s will.

**Our final observation may be gleaned from the last and it is this: that fellowship is not just doing anything together.** It is only doing God’s will together. Quite obviously, our fellowship with others is only as good as our fellowship

with Christ, our unity. And we can only participate with Him in doing God's will, for that is all He ever does! For this reason we must quit thinking of Christian fellowship as primarily doing things such as having pot luck dinners or watching football or playing basketball with other believers. These have their place but they are only fellowship to the extent that rest, exercise, and eating are doing the work of the Lord. Fellowship involves actively doing God's will. The things we usually think of as fellowship are certainly not the primary meaning of the word!

### **The Biblical Definition of Fellowship**

Now, with these seven observations, we should be able to give a biblical definition to the word, "fellowship." We can say that: "Fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth."

So, we have seen that fellowship in its New Testament sense is an inner unity expressed outwardly. It is not just being together but doing together. It is not just doing anything together but it is working together to accomplish God's will. Now we must ask, "Why is it so important to the church?" I think we shall see as we continue that:

### **Fellowship Is God's Way of Accomplishing His Plan of Glorifying Christ**

**1. The importance of fellowship to the church can be seen first in the fact that fellowship occurred naturally as a result of the establishment of the church.**

Nobody had to come to the disciples and other new believers on the day of Pentecost and say, "You need to practice fellowship." The Holy Spirit had come upon these people and formed an inner unity and their natural inclination was to exercise it outwardly. Acts 2:44-47 says this.

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; 45 and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. 46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, 47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

This working together to accomplish God's will continued in the church with the practice of a multiplicity of leadership, diversification of activities, giving to the needy, exercise of different spiritual gifts, support of missionaries, calls to different mission fields, corporate prayer, group worship, and in other ways.

But the importance of fellowship to the church does not rest solely upon the fact that it was the natural result of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Rather, its primary importance stems from the fact that:

**2. Fellowship is the indispensable means of accomplishing the God-given**

## **purpose of the church.**

Let's read together Ephesians 3:8-11.

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ...

We see in this passage that God has an eternal plan. The church has a part in accomplishing that plan. The phrase "through the church" in vs. 10 shows that the church is to be God's instrument in accomplishing His plan. The purpose of the church as stated in vs. 10 is to show to the world the manifold or in Greek, the many-faceted wisdom of God. So then, the purpose of the church is to hold God up to the world and display every glorious aspect of His being for all to see.

What is important to see here is that no individual working alone could ever fulfill this plan of showing every perfection of God for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So you see, the very nature of God's plan necessitates the Godly capacities of many individuals added together to show His perfections to the world. You might say that God's plan must be compared not to a solo but to a symphony. Its beauty is impossible to capture in one note no matter how loud. Only by a full orchestra playing together can the beautiful harmony be fully captured. And this is what the Church is, God's orchestra! In order to fully manifest God, each person must not only play his part but must play it together. So in God's symphony—His plan, the score is the Bible which reveals His Son, Jesus Christ. The instruments are our spiritual gifts and natural abilities. And the indispensable means we use to perform is fellowship, our co-participation in accomplishing His purpose. It is only as we work together in this way that it is possible to accomplish God's plan. This is why fellowship is indispensable to the church.

Of course, some people try to do it all themselves. The movie, "Beau Geste" is an example of the way some churches function. In the movie, the Arabs are attacking a foreign legion outpost. There are only four legionnaires left alive in the post. But they want the enemy to think they have lots of strength so they propped up the dead bodies of their comrades in the turrets and the four men ran around the walls shooting the dead men's guns for them. This is the plan of many churches today. They hire a large staff of clergy to prop up the spiritually dead and fire their guns for them. But this will never accomplish God's plan.

There is another group of people who are church-hoppers and non-participants. They think the church can make it without them. However, 1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear that every *single* member of the body is necessary for its proper functioning. Because of the importance of fellowship, no one has the right to amputate themselves from the functioning body of Christ, the local church.

So, then, we see that the practice of fellowship, the outward exercise of our inner unity

in doing God's will, is not only natural but indispensable in accomplishing God's purpose for the church. How, then, can we practice fellowship?

### **Practicing Fellowship**

You can practice Fellowship by recognizing our goal and taking an active part where you can best help.

**People must recognize our goal.** People often do not take part in a church because they see no clear purpose. As previously discussed, our purpose is to show God's glory to the world in all the many ways He has instructed us in the Bible. We participate together seven days a week to glorify God, to do it His way, and to do it together.

You can practice fellowship by taking an active part where you can best help with this goal. You can discover where you can best help by recognizing your spiritual gifts and natural abilities and by knowing the needs of our church. Then help where you can make not just yourself, but the church as a whole, to be the most fruitful. If you do not know your spiritual gift, pitch in where you have a natural ability. As you work with others, your gifts will surface and you'll find places you might function in our church according to your gifts and abilities.

### **Conclusion**

When I was in junior high, I had a pastor who had spent a summer on a pipeline crew. The first day, he was given a shovel and a piece of ground and told to dig six feet deep and three feet wide. By noon, he had dug down over his head and felt all alone at his work. By the middle of the afternoon he was pretty discouraged as he thought of the miles of line still to be dug. Finally, however, about five o'clock, he broke through into the trench the man in front of him was digging. As he cleared away the loose dirt, this man broke through into the next hole, and as they stood and watched, man after man broke through until several hundred feet of ditch was visible and my pastor felt quite a sense of accomplishment.

This is the way fellowship will affect us if we get in and dig together. With the unity of the Holy Spirit and a divine purpose, we must all put our shoulders to the plow until God's plan is complete.

So let's pull together. Let everyone practice fellowship as naturally as did those on the day of Pentecost that the many-faceted wisdom of God might be made known through this church.

## **Lesson 4: Worship (Part 1) (John 4:1-26)**

### **Introduction**

Worship has innumerable forms. The Moslem worships Alla in prayer by turning toward Mecca five times a day and repeating the same prayer. At some time in his life he makes a pilgrimage to Mecca where he will walk around the Kaaba seven times and kiss the sacred black stone. An American Indian may have worshiped by erecting a totem pole, offering up tobacco in the peace pipe, by sacrificing a finger joint or even a human being. Satan worshipers allegedly sacrifice infants and use some of the organs of mutilated animals. All of us would probably be willing to acknowledge that these forms of worship are misguided and erroneous although those who follow these practices do so with great sincerity.

Then, of course, there are the pagan forms of worship which we find within civilized America. There are those who worship the sun by taking off their clothes in nudist colonies. There are those who would have us understand that they find it much easier to worship God on the golf course or out on the lake or in the woods on Sunday morning.

Then again within what might be called ‘non-evangelical Christianity’ there is great diversity in what is understood to be worship. As I was researching in some periodicals, I found two rather suspicious titles, neither of which I consulted for this message. One title was, *Awareness Worship: A Clue to Creative Worship in the Out of Doors*. Another which caused me to raise my eyebrows was one entitled, *The Organist as Worship Leader*.

We should expect considerable confusion in this matter of worship from those who have departed from the central truths of the Scriptures. Meland states that when the ‘myth’ of the doctrine of the atonement was rationalized away by liberal theologians the focal point for worship disappeared as well.<sup>10</sup> Modern theologians have not yet found any workable substitute, nor will they.

But most distressing of all is the confusion which exists within the Protestant, evangelical, fundamental Christianity concerning the meaning of worship. Robert Webber, in an article in *Eternity* magazine, made this condemning statement concerning the ignorance of the Christian in the matter of worship:

... the majority of evangelical lay people don’t have the foggiest notion of what corporate worship really is. To questions such as: Why does God want to be worshipped? What is the meaning of an invocation or benediction? What does reading the Scripture, praying, or hearing a sermon have to do with worship? I received blank stares and bewildered

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard E. Meland, *Modern Man’s Worship* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1951), p. 37.

looks.<sup>11</sup>

In preparing for this message, I have consulted a number of books and articles, and if they are representative, not only do the laymen not know what worship is, neither do the so-called scholars.

### **The Importance of Worship**

Some may wonder why all the fuss over this matter of worship. Before we go on to try and define what worship is, let us first begin our study by dealing with the importance of worship.

The first reason for our study of worship has already been suggested. Simply stated, we need to study worship because there is so much confusion and so little understanding and practice of worship.

Negatively, there is a second reason why we should search the Scriptures on the subject of worship. It is because of the severe consequences of false worship. Cain's sacrifice was rejected by God because it was false worship (Genesis 4:5). Three thousand people died in one day because of the false worship of the golden calf fashioned by Aaron (Exodus 32). The kingdom of Israel was divided because of the idolatry and false worship of the nation (1 Kings 11:31-33). The fall of Jerusalem was directly attributable to the apostasy and false worship of the nation (Jeremiah 1:16; 16:11; 22:9). Misdirected worship was the cause of untold hardship and suffering in the Old Testament. In the first chapter of Romans, Paul wrote that God was justified in condemning man because he worshiped in error:

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Romans 1:25).

Satan fell from heaven because he sought worship for himself rather than submission to his Creator. Satan today seeks those who will worship and serve him (cf. Matt. 4:9).

The third reason, and by far the primary one for considering the subject of worship worthy of our consideration is because worship is of great importance to God. That is the clear teaching of passages such as John chapter 4.

But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers (John 4:23).

God is seeking men and women to be worshipers of Himself. But this worship must be worship that is "in spirit and in truth." It is not enough to be a worshiper of God; God is seeking true worshipers. It is only in the Word of God that we can learn what worship is pleasing to God.

Why, then, should we devote ourselves to the study of worship? Simply because it is a matter of great importance to God and because false worship leads to dire consequences. With all the current confusion on the subject, we must return to the Scriptures for our infallible guide to true worship which pleases Him.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Webber, "Agenda for the Church: 1976-2000," *Eternity*, January, 1976, p. 15.

## The Essence of True Worship

### Words Used for Worship

A brief glance at a good Bible concordance will reveal that there are a number of Greek and Hebrew words which are rendered 'to worship' or 'worshiper.' In the Scriptures, there are three pairs of words which underscore for us the three primary elements of true worship.

**Humility.** The most frequent word in both the Old and New Testaments is one which means to make obeisance, to bow down, to prostrate.<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew word is *shaha...*, and the Greek word is *proskuneo*. Both words denote the act of bowing or prostrating oneself in submissiveness and reverence. The outward posture reflected an inner attitude of humility and respect. The word might be used of men showing respect for men as well as a response to deity. As the word relates to worship, it denotes a high view of God and a condescending opinion of self. Thus, true worship views God in His perfection and man in his imperfection.

**Reverence.** Another pair of terms underscores the attitude of reverence. The Hebrew word is *yare...*, and the Greek term is *sebomai*. The idea of both the Greek and the Hebrew is that of fearing God. It is not so much the fear of terror and dread so much as it is the fear of wonder and awe at the majesty and greatness of the infinite God. Davidson differentiates 'humility' from 'reverence' in that the first pair of terms focus inward. We are aware of our finiteness and sinfulness in the light of His infinity and perfection. The second pair of terms focus outwardly upon the awesome majesty of God.<sup>13</sup> Irreverence is antithetical to worship. No doubt, it was the irreverence of the Corinthians at the Lord's Table that required such severe discipline as sickness and death (1 Corinthians 11:30). Paul said that they did not 'judge the body rightly' (1 Corinthians 11:29). If I understand Paul correctly, he is saying that to participate in the remembrance of the Lord's Table, to partake of the elements which symbolize the body of our Lord in a light or irreverent way is to bring upon ourselves the discipline of God. Drunkenness and frivolity at the Lord's Table reveals a spirit of irreverence which is diametrically opposed to true worship.

**Service.** The third pair of terms employed for worship in the Bible emphasize service. The Hebrew term, *abad*, and its Greek counterpart, *latreuo...*, denotes the idea 'to work, to labor, or to serve.' In the Old Testament this service was most often priestly service. In the New Testament we are told that we are all priests of God (1 Peter 2:5,9), so that this term does not apply only to the service of the few, but of the entire congregation of believers in Christ.

In addition, service and worship were often linked in the Old Testament. It is no surprise, then, when we find Satan tempting our Lord to worship him (Luke 4:7). Satan was not asking our Lord simply to fall to the ground before him. He was asking the Lord to acknowledge him as sovereign and to surrender to him in service. This is why our Lord responded, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him

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<sup>12</sup> Francis Davidson, "The Scriptural Doctrine of Worship," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 1935, p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

only” (Luke 4:8).

Worship and service cannot be isolated, but rather they must be integrated, if it is to be true worship.

### **Further Light on Worship**

The study of any subject such as worship must consider more than just the words themselves, for the context in which these words are found can add much to our understanding of the subject also. In addition to the ideas of humility, reverence, and service, we can add four other essential facets of worship.

**Response.** The first facet of worship that we should consider is that of response. By this we mean that worship, from man’s perspective is primarily a matter of response. Approached from any perspective other than that of the Scriptures, man would probably suggest that worship was something that man devised to give expression to inner desires and needs. Although man has been created with what has been called a ‘God-shaped vacuum,’ we worship not so much because we feel the need of doing so, but because God has first revealed Himself to us. The case is similar to that of love, concerning which we are told,

“We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Love does not find its origin in man, but in God. Our love is only a response, only a reflection of God’s love toward us. And so it is with worship. We worship God because He has made Himself known to us and has instructed us to worship Him.

There is a passage in the book of Romans which states,

“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

This is surely the case with worship. Fallen man could never approach a righteous and Holy God, so God in the person of Jesus Christ made us just and righteous by His work on the cross for us (Romans 3:21-24). The Holy Spirit of God works within us to enable us to worship (Philippians 3:3). And worship is directed to the Father (John 4:23). Worship is from God, through God, and unto God. Apart from God’s revelation of Himself and of how man can approach Him in worship, man could never worship God in a way pleasing to Him.

**Adoration.** If worship is fundamentally a response, what is the nature of this response? It is that of adoration and praise which God rightfully expects of His creatures. Though worship is the primary calling of the one who has placed his trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ in the present age, it is also that which our Lord shall receive from those who reject Him, for in the book of Philippians we read,

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 3:9-11).

Throughout the book of Psalms we find the continual expression, “Praise the Lord.”

That is the spirit of worship. We are told in the Psalms,

“Yet Thou are holy, O Thou who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel”  
(Psalm 22:3).

No book in all the Bible gives us a better pattern for praise and adoration in worship than the book of Psalms.

**Sacrifice.** A third facet of worship is that of sacrifice. Central in the worship of Israel in the Tabernacle and in the Temple was the practice of sacrifice. When Abraham worshiped God in Genesis chapter 22, the offering was termed worship. The presentation of the first-fruits was also regarded as an act of worship (Deuteronomy 26:10). When the wise men came to worship the baby Who was the Savior of the world, they came with gifts to give. When David sinned by numbering the people of Israel and God stretched forth His hand with the plague, judgment was stayed when David built an altar on the threshing floor of Ornan. Ornan offered to give the land to David, but David responded,

No, but I will surely buy it for the full price; for I will not take what is yours for the Lord, or offer a burnt offering which costs me nothing (1 Chronicles 21:24).

In the New Testament the idea of sacrifice is still prominent in worship, but rather than the sacrifice of offerings it is the sacrifice of self which is essential.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship (Romans 12:1).

The book of Hebrews adds to this the sacrifice of praise, of doing good and of sharing (Hebrews 13:15,16).

**Proclamation.** The aspect of proclamation admittedly is perhaps most subject to debate, but it nevertheless seems to me to be a vital part of worship. The nation Israel was not to worship God in secret, but were to be a ‘light to the Gentiles.’ In this task Israel failed, but it was nevertheless a part of their responsibility to worship their Redeemer. When Abraham worshiped, he built an altar and ‘called upon the name of the Lord’ (Genesis 12:8; 21:33). In the New Testament, we are told that the church has been created by God,

“in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10).

Whenever the saints partake of the Lord’s Table they ‘proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes’ (1 Corinthians 11:26). As has been repeatedly said, we cannot look at ourselves as spectators watching what God is doing, but rather we must view ourselves as actors upon the stage, who are being observed by both those in heaven as well as those on the earth.

### **A Definition of Worship**

From our consideration of worship thus far, we should be able to arrive at a working

definition of worship:

**Worship is the humble response of regenerate men to the self-disclosure of the Most High God. It is based upon the work of God. It is achieved through the activity of God. It is directed to God. It is expressed by the lips in praise and by the life in service.**

### **Application**

Now let's put our definition to work by applying it to four activities which take place in nearly every evangelical church and are often equated with worship.

**Prayer.** Prayer is often thought to be synonymous with worship. Although prayer can be worship, it most often falls short of it. Are our prayers marked by adoration and praise? Do they focus upon Who God is and what He has done? Or do they turn into grocery lists of petitions for our needs? In other words, do our prayers focus upon God's goodness or our needs and desires?

Some time ago a mature gentleman visited our church and I shall never forget his prayer. It was devoted exclusively to expressing praise and adoration to God. To my recollection there was not one request made. I shall never forget that prayer and I know that many of you can remember it as well.

Now I am not saying that it is wrong to make our requests known to God for we are instructed to do so (Philippians 4:6). I am saying that we should not deceive ourselves into thinking that in so doing we are worshiping. Let me encourage you to set aside certain times for prayer which are exclusively devoted to adoration and praise. If you have trouble beginning, simply start by considering the attributes of God, His mercy, love, longsuffering, and so on. When we come together as a church, it would be good for us to set apart a certain portion of the meeting to worship, where our prayers express our adoration of God. The reading of a Psalm may help to set a pattern for such prayers.

**Testimonies.** There are some who might question whether or not testimonies would ever qualify as worship. Certainly any testimony which places the spotlight upon ourselves would not be worship. But as we look at the Psalms, we must recognize that many of them are based upon some experience on the part of the writer. This experience becomes a vehicle which turns the attention of the psalmist to the greatness of his God. He knows that God is merciful and kind not only because the Bible tells him so, but because God has been at work in his life.

I would never want to discourage anyone from sharing with the saints what God has been doing in their life, rather I would want to encourage you to look upon your experience as an opportunity to share with others the goodness and kindness of the Lord. A testimony is an excellent opportunity to praise God for Who He is and what He has done. Praise the Lord, great things He has done!

**Singing and Music.** While we are still thinking of the Psalms, let us remember that Israel sang many of their praises to God. The praises of the people were set to music and sung. Music can be used to quiet our hearts and minds and focus them upon God and

His goodness. Music can also be an instrument through which our praise and adoration can be expressed to God.

We should realize, however, that all so-called Christian music is not the music of worship. Some music is flat-out worthless, either because of its message or its medium. Other music is intended for other purposes than worship. For example, the song ‘Trust and Obey’ is not directed toward God, but toward the saints. It is a song of instruction and encouragement. There is nothing wrong with such music, but we should realize that it is not the music of worship. In our hymnals we may find headings which remind us that some songs are appropriate for worship, while others are not. If we intend to worship God in music, let us be careful to select music which focuses upon God and expresses adoration and praise to Him. A song such as ‘Great Is Thy Faithfulness’ or ‘How Great Thou Art’ is, in my estimation, a song of worship. When we come to the worship portion of our meeting, let us remember this.

**Preaching.** Some have unfortunately equated the worship service with the preaching service. These words of Robert Webber are words of warning to those who would pursue true worship:

Part of the problem is that we have made our churches into centers of evangelism and instruction. The focus of our services are on man and his needs instead of God and His glory. This is true, for example in music, where its triteness in content and tune tends to entertain rather than provoke worship. Further, a fancy pulpiteering has made worship seem peripheral or at least preliminary to preaching.<sup>14</sup>

Preaching by itself is seldom worship, and then only by one man, but preaching which is God-centered and directs our attention and affection to Him may prompt worship. That is one of the reasons why we placed the teaching service ahead of the worship service in our church. There is need for preaching to men as they are, but there is also a need to draw men’s minds from their own problems and frustrations to God’s greatness and goodness. This kind of preaching will promote worship.

If worship is a measure of a New Testament church, I wonder how God evaluates Community Bible. If worship is the highest calling of the saint, how are we living up to our calling? May God enable us to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

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<sup>14</sup> “Agenda for the Church: 1976-2000,” p. 15.

## **Lesson 5: Worship (Part 2) (John 4:19-26 )**

### **Introduction**

Höffding, in one of his books, tells of a Danish Protestant church in which the worshipers, passing down the aisle, always turned and bowed towards a blank white space on the side wall. No valid reason for this practice could be given, save that it was the custom of the local church-goers to bow in that direction. No other and better reason was forthcoming until a thorough restoration of the interior of the fabric discovered beneath the whitewash on the walls a pre-Reformation mural painting of the Virgin Mary. The Catholic custom of obeisance to the Virgin had survived three hundred years of obliterating Protestant whitewash.<sup>15</sup>

There is a great lesson for us to learn from this story when it comes to the doctrine of worship (and many others). Some of the practices of the evangelical church which are presumed to be biblical are simply the carry-over of past traditions which have no biblical support, and have been sanctified by a little Protestant whitewash. For example, while Protestant churches espouse the principle of the priesthood of every believer, the conduct of worship has been carefully confined to a small group called the clergy. The Roman Catholic church failed to see a distinction between Old Testament and New Testament principles of worship and therefore perpetuated the Old Testament priestly system. After the Reformation, the Protestant church only partially returned to the New Testament principle of the priesthood of every believer and whitewashed the Old Testament priesthood by calling it the clergy.

The lesson for us is that we must examine every facet of our doctrine and practice to see if we are truly following the New Testament or simply perpetuating some ancient or medieval error. In this lesson we shall re-examine the doctrine of worship. First we will endeavor to demonstrate distinctions in the practice of New Testament worship from that of other dispensations. Then we shall define principles for worship in this present age, and finally discuss the practice of these principles of worship in the gathering of the New Testament church.

### **Worship Through the Ages<sup>16</sup>**

#### **Before the Law**

In the Scriptures we have only incidental references to worship before the giving of the Law. From these few instances we can suggest that the primary emphasis was upon an

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<sup>15</sup> Willard L. Sperry, *Reality in Worship*, p. 48, as quoted by Robert Orville Bitner, 'The Doctrine of Worship' (Unpublished Master's thesis, Dallas, Texas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1954), p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> This section is adapted from above-cited thesis by Robert Bitner, pp. 39-52.

individual relationship to God (Genesis 4:3-4; 8:20; 12:7-8; 22:5; Job 1:5). We may also suggest that the father acted as the priest for his household (Genesis 8:20; 22:1-19; Job 1:5). There was no central place of worship prescribed, with the worshipers offering sacrifices on altars which they built (Genesis 8:20; 12:7-8; 22:9). Besides the offering of sacrifices, worship in this period was characterized by the expression of thanks to God (Genesis 24:26, 48, 52; Exodus 4:31; 12:27). There were no stipulated times of worship.

### **Under the Law**

Under the Law, worship was much more minutely prescribed and regulated.<sup>17</sup> A Levitical priesthood was instituted, with Aaron's family designated as those who could offer sacrifices (Exodus 28:1). Aaron, as the high priest, could enter the holiest place of the Tabernacle once a year (Leviticus 16). The place of worship was centralized, first in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple (Exodus 20:24; Deuteronomy 12:5, 11; 14:23). In addition to the daily sacrifices offered morning and evening (Exodus 29:38-42), there were five specified offerings: the burnt, meal, peace, sin, and trespass offerings (Leviticus 1-7). Although there was no specified time given for these five offerings, Israel was given a calendar of seven special feasts: Passover, unleavened bread, first fruits, Pentecost, trumpets, day of atonement, and tabernacles.

### **In the Millennium**

In the millennial kingdom, the Levitical priesthood will be restored, with the unfaithful line of priests (Ezekiel 44:10-14) replaced by the faithful sons of Zadok (Ezekiel 44:15-27). Worship will be centered around the magnificent temple described by Ezekiel (chapters 40-43). The five Levitical offerings will be reinstated (Ezekiel 40:39; 42:13; 43:18-27; 45:13-20; 46:12); however, the Prince will offer these sacrifices for the nation (Ezekiel 45:17). These sacrifices will serve as a memorial, much like the Lord's Table does for Christians today.<sup>18</sup> Some of the feast days will also be observed (Ezekiel 45:21-25). Worship will not be restricted to the nation Israel, but will include all nations (Zechariah 14:16).

In short, worship in the Millennium will be somewhat of a restoration of the worship under the Law, except that Israel's Prince will be present and the observances will no longer be anticipatory, but rather, memorials. Jerusalem and the Temple will be the

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<sup>17</sup> "Blackwood finds that worship under the law displayed five outstanding characteristics. First, everything was prescribed in a precise manner. Second, the element of sacrifice was prominent. The third, fourth, and fifth characteristic features are the prominence of the priest, of the place of worship, and the program of sabbaths, appointed feasts, and year of jubilee." Andrew W. Blackwood, *The Fine Art of Public Worship*, pp. 33-35, quoted by Bitner, pp. 40-41.

<sup>18</sup> "But what is the meaning and the purpose of these animal sacrifices? The answer is quite simple. While the sacrifices Israel brought once had a prospective meaning, the sacrifices brought in the millennial temple have a retrospective meaning. When during this age God's people worship in the appointed way at His table, with the bread and wine as the memorial of His love, it is a retrospect. We look back to the Cross. We show forth His death. ... The resumed sacrifices will be the memorial of the Cross and the whole wonderful story of the redemption for Israel and the nations of the earth, during the kingdom reign of Christ." Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 312, quoted by Bitner, p. 44.

center of worship, with Christ reigning as King and Priest, the object of worship.

### **In Heaven**

From what we can glean in the book of Revelation, heaven will be an unparalleled opportunity for ceaseless and untainted worship. There will be no offering of sacrifices, but rather constant expressions of praise to God. Worship will be conducted in the presence of God before the throne (Revelation 4:2-11; 5:8-14; 7:11-12; 11:16; 19:4). There are no specific times of worship, but rather one continual time of praise and adoration (Revelation 4:8; 7:15). There is a temple described during this period (Revelation 3:12; 7:15; 11:19, etc.).

### **In Eternity**

In the eternal state we see what is in essence a continuation of that which will have taken place in heaven. There is one notable exception, however, and this is that we are told there is no longer any temple:

And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple (Revelation 21:22).

Here all the symbols and types are cast aside in the presence of Him who is the realization of all they anticipated. Here worship centers forever on God Himself.

### **In Our Age**

Against the background of worship as practiced in other ages, we turn our attention to the distinctives of worship in this age of Grace. In this age, there is no human intermediary between men and God; rather every believer in Christ is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9). Jesus Christ is the great High Priest (Hebrews 10:21). There is no central earthly place of worship, nor is there an appointed calendar of sacred feasts or religious observances. In contrast to the age of Law, there are no carefully prescribed rituals, and the only sacrifices are 'spiritual sacrifices' (Romans 12:1; 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:5). Worship in the present age most closely resembles that which will occur in heaven, and sharply differs from that prescribed by the Law. Those who fail to appreciate this sharp distinction between worship in this age and worship under the Law inevitably tend toward worship which violates the Scriptures.

### **Principles of Worship for This Age**

We should be able to discern that if worship is to be pleasing to God, it must be in keeping with principles set down for its observance in this age. Nowhere are these principles set down more clearly than in John's account of our Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John chapter 4. As a Samaritan,<sup>19</sup> this woman believed that the central place where God was to be worshiped was on Mount Gerizim (John 4:20). Although she, as a Samaritan, looked for the coming Messiah, she worshiped in

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<sup>19</sup> Consult the article on the Samaritans in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, pp. 244-247.

considerable ignorance for the Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament books save those books of Moses, called the Pentateuch. Even these Scriptures were altered to conform to the Samaritan preoccupation with Mount Gerizim. In the light of her Samaritan misconceptions, our Lord reveals to this woman the essential principles of worship in this Age.

### **All Worship Is Not Acceptable to God**

The clear implication of our Lord's conversation with this woman was that her worship was not acceptable before God. She worshiped in ignorance and not according to truth. Her worship was not essentially spiritual. The purpose of our Lord's conversation with her was to lead her to true worship of Himself.

We know of other instances where false worship was condemned. Paul corrected the erroneous worship of the Athenians (Acts 17:16-31) and taught that false worship was the basis for man's eternal condemnation (Romans 1:25). The Old Testament prophets continually rebuked the nation of Israel for turning from true worship. In our times, men seem to feel that the only qualification for worship is that it be sincere, but much sincere worship is unacceptable to God, as we shall soon see.

### **God Is the Initiatory of True Worship**

Though men may seek religious expression, no one seeks after God (Romans 3:10f). The words of our Lord to the Samaritan woman indicate that it is the Father who actively seeks true worshipers (John 4:23). When we turn back to the first verses of this account, we learn that our Lord made it a point to pass through Samaria (4:4). Our Lord was seeking this woman and her fellow countrymen to be His worshipers.

God has initiated our worship of Himself in several ways. First, He has revealed Himself to us in human flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ. When men recognized Him as God's Messiah, they worshiped Him (e.g. John 9:35-38). Secondly, He has accomplished redemption through the work of Jesus Christ. The sin which alienated us from God has been paid for by the death of Christ. Finally, He has given us the written word which instructs us in true worship.

### **God Is the Enabler of Acceptable Worship**

As we have seen from Romans 11:36, all things are "of Him and through Him and unto Him." Just as God has initiated worship, so He continues to enable us to worship through the agency of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26; Philippians 3:3).

### **God Is the Object of Acceptable Worship**

To put it in a slightly different form, all acceptable worship is God-centered. Worship is rightly focused on the Father. God was worshiped through the Son while He was on the earth. In ancient times, God forbade the use of images or idols because they could not begin to adequately represent God to men. But Jesus Christ is the full representation of God to men; He is the express image, the perfect likeness of the Father (Colossians 1:15). Our Lord could say that those who had seen the Son, had seen the Father (John 14:9).

Worship is God-centered in another sense as well. Worship centers around God and His perfection, and His desire for praise and adoration. All too often we try to modernize worship, to update it and make it more meaningful and relevant to us. Now, of course, worship should be ‘relevant and meaningful’ to us, but we must see that worship is first and foremost for God’s sake rather than our own. We have placed far too much emphasis upon what God will do for us rather than upon our duty of devotion to God.

Here we find one of the very practical aspects of what has been called Calvinism. In its simplest form, Calvinism stresses the sovereignty of God over all things, including our eternal salvation. For those who in ignorance espouse Arminianism, true worship would be far more difficult, I would imagine, for they never view God as being in complete and uninterrupted control of things. Calvinism is God-centered and rightly so. No one should be a better worshiper of God than a true Calvinist. Those Arminians who are true worshipers of God (and there are many) are simply inconsistent in their theology at this point.

### **Acceptable Worship Is Worship in Spirit**

When our Lord told the Samaritan woman, “ALL those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (vs. 24), He did not intend us to put a capital “s” in spirit. The Samaritan woman, as did many Jews, thought that worship was essentially a matter of externals. She was preoccupied with a central place of worship: “this mountain” (verse 20). The Jews thought of worship in terms of sacrifices, rituals, observances and holy days. The essence of true worship is internal (in spirit) not external. This is necessitated by the nature of God Himself. God is a spirit being; thus, we must worship consistent with His nature.

Israel’s worship under the Law consisted of many ceremonies and rituals, but even then God was concerned with what went on in the spirit of those who worshiped. Over and over again the outward forms and motions of worship were condemned by the prophets (Isaiah 1:10-17; 29:13; Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-7). This is why an unbeliever can never worship God; his spirit has never been quickened. He is dead in his trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Even today there is so much emphasis on externals. The sight of stained-glass windows and magnificent cathedrals, the stirring sound of massive choirs and expensive organs, the eloquent oratory of the preacher, the dignity of liturgy and so on.

Let us not become preoccupied with these externals, but rather with Communion with God in our spirits, as the Holy Spirit works to communicate between our spirit and God’s (1 Corinthians 2:10ff.).

### **Acceptable Worship Is Worship in Truth**

As countless others, the Samaritan woman worshiped in ignorance; she worshiped “what she knew not” (vs. 22). Acceptable worship can never be that which we deem best; it must be a response to the divine self-disclosure of God. Our Lord Jesus personified God’s truth (John 14:6) and so men could worship Him in truth. If our worship today is

not firmly based on the truth of God revealed in the Scriptures, it is ignorant worship, unacceptable to God.

### **There Is Freedom in Worship in Our Age**

One of the striking contrasts between the worship of our age and that under the Law is the freedom which we are given. When we seek to find the word ‘worship’ in the epistles, we rarely find it. This is not because it is nowhere to be found, but because worship was so integral a part of the life of the church it was almost assumed. We find worship in the epistles wherever we find the fundamental ingredients of worship. It is this freedom in worship which our Lord communicated to the woman at the well, but a freedom restricted to what was revealed as truth.

We do ourselves a great disservice when we think of worship only in stereotyped terms. But we also would be in error in assuming that spontaneity is spirituality. C. S. Lewis put his finger on the distractiveness of novelty when he wrote:

Novelty, simply as such, can have only an entertainment value. And they don’t go to church to be entertained. They go to use the service, or, if you prefer, to enact it. Every service is a structure of acts and words through which we receive a sacrament, or repent, or supplicate, or adore. And it enables us to do those things best—if you like, it ‘works’ best—when, through long familiarity, we don’t have to think about it. ... The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.

But every novelty presents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping. ...

... Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but on the celebrant. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude it, the question “What on earth is he up to now?” will intrude. It lays one’s devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said, “I wish they’d remember that the charge to Peter was “Feed my sheep, not try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks.”<sup>20</sup>

Novelty, or we may say spontaneity, seems to have been the problem with the worship of the Corinthians. This is why Paul had to remind them that orderliness was next to godliness (1 Corinthians 14:40). We must, in worship, maintain the balance between freedom and frenzy, between cold ritualism and reckless spontaneity.

### **Worship Is Our Highest Calling**

By way of reminder, let me reiterate the principle that worship is our highest calling. In the Larger Catechism we are told “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully enjoy Him forever.” Worship is the occupation of eternity.

In a time when we are encouraged to work for God, let us be reminded that our highest calling is to be worshipers of God and then to be workers. Never let your work for Him

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<sup>20</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, pp. 4-5.

come before your worship of Him.

Some have said that men can be so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good. This can never be the case with worship, for we are of no earthly good until we have become pre-occupied with worshipping Him. That true worship will always bear the fruit of service.

### **Worship in the Church Meeting**

Within the broad principles laid down in the New Testament there is a great freedom in the expression of worship at the church meeting. We do not see elaborate or detailed liturgy or structure. We find no stained glass conceptions of what worship must be. There is no appointed place of worship and the only appointed time of worship is that of the weekly remembrance of the Lord commonly referred to as Communion or the Lord's Table. Our Lord commanded us, "do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

We know from the early chapters of the book of Acts that initially the Christians observed the Lord's Table daily (Acts 2:42, 46). Apparently, this practice did not continue indefinitely but settled down to a weekly remembrance at the church meeting (cf. Acts 20:7). From early church writers it is evident that the Lord's Table was considered central in their worship.<sup>21</sup> Later church history continues to support the high regard in which the Lord's Table was held.<sup>22</sup>

It was not until the middle ages that the observance of the Lord's Table became encrusted with Roman Catholic tradition. The Lord's Table was no longer regarded as a simple remembrance of the person and work of Jesus Christ once for all and His accomplishment of our salvation on the cross. Instead, the doctrine of the perpetual sacrifice developed. It was believed that there was a daily repetition of the work of Christ on Calvary, with the priest offering the work of Christ to God in the elements of the

<sup>21</sup> Justin Martyr, a second century Christian apologist, described the remembrance of the Lord's Table in his First Apology:

"But we, after we have thus washed him who has been convinced and has assented to our teaching, bring him to the place where those who are called brethren are assembled, in order that we may offer hearty prayers in common for ourselves and for the baptized (illuminated) person, and for all others in every place, that we may be counted worthy, now that we have learned the truth, by our works also to be found good citizens and keepers of the commandments, so that we may be saved with an everlasting salvation. Having ended the prayers, we salute one another with a kiss. There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water; and he taking them gives praise and glory to the Father of the universe, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, and offers thanks at considerable length for our being counted worthy to receive these things at His hands. And when he has concluded the prayers and thanksgivings, all the people present express their assent by saying Amen." Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin," chapter LXVII, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, I, 186, as quoted by Bitner, pp. 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> "Except in very recent times and among some branches of Protestant Christendom, observance of the Supper has always been the paramount act of Christian worship. Through the long centuries details have changed, theological conceptions have altered, rituals have been developed and disappeared, abuses have arisen, superstitions have gathered, conflicts have been engendered, wars have been fought—all concerning this rite. . . . All this should not blind us to the fact that it is the central *importance* of this Act of Worship, that has made men so keenly and even bitterly zealous concerning it." S. Arthur Devan, *Ascent to Zion*, pp. 41-42, as quoted by Robert Orville Bitner, *The Doctrine of Worship*, pp. 58-59.

bread and wine.

The Reformers totally rejected the Roman Catholic error, emphasizing a restitution of the vernacular in worship, encouraging greater participation on the part of the people, and introducing the singing of hymns. The Scriptures were translated into the language of the people and the masses were exhorted to study the Word of God for themselves. Direct access to God without the mediation of the church was taught and there was a renewed emphasis on preaching.

While resisting the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers did not waver in their appreciation of the remembrance of the Lord's Table. Both Luther and Calvin emphasized the need for frequent remembrance of the Lord.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the high view of the Lord's Table by the Reformers, it has most often not held the central place which it had formerly. Why has the Communion service declined and the preaching service seemingly taken its place? Let me suggest several possibilities.

First, we have never totally shaken the idea of a priesthood which is solely authorized to serve Communion. In the New Testament, every male believer-priest was given the privilege of serving the elements. Although the Roman Catholic concept of the priesthood has been rejected by Protestantism, nevertheless, it is somehow thought that some member of the clergy must 'administer the sacraments.' Consequently, the Lord's Supper is thought to be more the domain of the clergy than of the masses.

We should not think that the priesthood of every believer has been snatched from the grasp of reluctant laymen, for in most instances this privilege has been forfeited by default. The Christian 'laymen' have not lived up to their responsibilities and would far rather hire someone to take over their priestly duties than to assume the responsibility themselves.

Second, I would suggest that declining understanding of the doctrine of worship has led to a corresponding lack of appreciation for the Lord's Table. In addition to this, there has been an increasing emphasis upon relevance and emotional gratification. This has led to more emphasis on the sermon because it is thought to be 'more relevant to me and my needs.' In short, we have become more self-centered in our 'worship' than God-centered.

Third, some have insisted that a regular weekly remembrance of the Lord makes the event less significant because it happens so frequently. To hold Communion less frequently makes it an event of more moment, we are told. First of all, this view gives too little weight to the command of our Lord 'to be doing this in remembrance of Him.'

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<sup>23</sup> "Luther held that the Lord's Supper ought 'to be celebrated daily throughout Christendom.' This was in 1520; later he consented to have it celebrated only on Sundays; but it was always central in his thought. Calvin insisted that 'The Lord's Supper should be celebrated in Christian congregations once a week at the very least.' Neither of these men had the faintest idea of replacing sacramental worship by a preaching service. What they desired was to replace the non-communicating Eucharist of the mass, by a celebration of the Lord's Supper with sermon and actual Communion by the people." S. Arthur Devan, *Ascent to Zion*, pp. 41-42, as quoted by Bitner, p. 60.

This is the force of the present imperative which our Lord employed in Luke 22:19. Strangely enough, I have never heard anyone suggest the same kind of practice with respect to the physical relationship between a man and his wife. It is not the frequency or lack of frequency of the Lord's Table which makes it significant, but how we view the meaning of the event.

One who is older and wiser than I has suggested that the Lord's Table is a pretty accurate barometer of our own spirituality. If we are lackadaisical about attending and participating, it probably speaks more of our own spiritual deficit than of the celebration itself. If we have come prepared to praise and worship our Redeemer, we will find the meeting a great delight.

May God help us to worship Him in spirit and truth.

## **Lesson 6: Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11)**

### **Introduction**

In the life of the local church there are two major problems related to the subject of spiritual gifts. The first is that far too few Christians are involved in any kind of ministry. They conceive of themselves as spectators rather than participants. None of these 'spectators' have the joy of being actively involved in ministry and of seeing God work through them in the exercise of their spiritual gifts. We shall assume that on the basis of our study in Ephesians 4:16 you would no longer consider this a viable option.

A second problem is with those who are actively involved in the ministry of the local church, but who are not functioning in a ministry which corresponds to their spiritual gifts. Their dilemma is illustrated by the story of a certain sea captain and his chief engineer who were having an argument as to which one of them was the more important to the ship. Failing to agree, they resorted to the unique idea of swapping places. The chief ascended to the bridge, and the captain dived into the engine room. After a couple of hours, the captain suddenly appeared on the deck covered with oil and soot.

"Chief!" he yelled, wildly waving aloft a monkey wrench. "You'll have to come down here; I can't make her go!"

"Of course you can't," replied the chief. "She's aground!"

Perhaps one reason why so many have chosen to do so little or nothing in the way of ministry in the local church is because they have seen how frustrated those are who are striving to accomplish tasks they were never intended to attempt. The primary qualification for most tasks in the church is a willingness to try, or at least too little fortitude to turn down the job.

The solution to both these problems is a proper understanding of the subject of spiritual gifts. You will understand that many books on the subject of spiritual gifts have been written and that no one message will deal with every important issue. But it is my contention that Bible expositors have often made of this subject something far more mystical and mysterious and complicated than it really is. And you know that if there is anyone who can look at a matter with simplicity, it is me. My friends often remind me how simple I really am!

### **The Importance of Knowing Your Spiritual Gift**

For various reasons, many have played down the importance of knowing your spiritual gift. Let's begin our study of spiritual gifts by suggesting several reasons why it is imperative for every Christian to know his gift.

**1. The prominence of spiritual gifts in Scripture.** One of the ways we can

measure the importance of a principle or a doctrine is to determine the amount of space devoted to it in the Bible. Subjects or doctrines which are merely implied are surely of less significance than those clearly stated. Matters mentioned infrequently should not be regarded as crucial as those frequently dealt with. Using this standard of measurement, the subject of spiritual gifts is a vital one, for we find gifts addressed specifically in four major portions of Scripture: 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14; Romans chapter 12; Ephesians chapter 4; and 1 Peter chapter 4. In addition to these central passages, spiritual gifts are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. Spiritual gifts must be important to the Spirit of God Who inspired the writing of the Word of God and thus they should be important to us.

**2. The elementary nature of spiritual gifts.** When the book of First Corinthians was written, it was addressed to those who were obviously not very mature in the faith. There were many forms of carnality cited by Paul in this epistle. The things of which Paul wrote in this book were not matters of the 'deeper life,' but rather the elemental truths of the Christian life. Due to the emphasis on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians, we conclude that the doctrine of spiritual gifts is important and that it is foundational and fundamental to the Christian life.

**3. Spiritual gifts are a matter of individual stewardship.** When Peter spoke of spiritual gifts in his first epistle, he considered them a matter of personal stewardship:

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Peter meant that just as we must give account of our use of the material things God has placed under our control, and just as we must give account of the use of our time, so we must also be accountable for the use of our spiritual gifts.

Now it is very hard to be a good steward of something we know nothing about, and of something which we do not even know we possess. If you were given the responsibility of managing the assets of someone else, the first thing you would do is to take inventory of what resources were at your disposal. You would demand to know what assets you were to use wisely. So, also, the Christian cannot be a good steward in the matter of spiritual gifts without knowing what his gifts are:

- Spiritual gifts are of great practical value and benefit to the believer.
- Spiritual gifts are of such great practical value to the Christian he simply cannot afford to be ignorant in this matter. Let me suggest some areas of practical benefit.

**Knowing your spiritual gift(s) will enable you to find your place of ministry in the local church.** Since every Christian has a particular function in the body of Christ, and since your spiritual gifts equip you to carry out this function, knowing your gifts help you to plug in to the ministry of a local church.

**Knowing your spiritual gift(s) will enable you to determine your priorities.** One of the most common problems we all face is having more things to do than we have time to do them. Paul indicates in Romans chapter twelve, verses six through eight, that we should make the use of our spiritual gifts a priority in our lives. In simple terms,

when we have too many things to do we must choose to function in the area of our spiritual gifts. You must know your spiritual gifts to set these priorities.

**Knowing your spiritual gift(s) will be of great help in discerning God's will.**

To extend our last point just a little bit further, knowing your spiritual gift(s) can be of great help in discerning the will of God. The choice of your occupation, whether 'secular' or 'religious,' should take into account whether or not it will help or hinder the exercise and development of your spiritual gift. If you are not gifted to teach, you have a valuable insight into God's will when you are offered a teaching position. There is a very distinct relationship between knowing the will of God (Romans 12:1-2) and understanding your spiritual gift (Romans 12:3-8).

**The Purpose of Spiritual Gifts**

Probably the simplest definition of a spiritual gift would be this: **A spiritual gift is the God-given capacity of every Christian to carry out his function in the body of Christ.**

The thrust of the first half of Ephesians chapter four is that the effective functioning of the body of Christ is dependent upon the contribution of each individual part of the body. Spiritual gifts enable us to carry out our task within the body of Christ in a way which no one else can. Using the analogy of the physical body in 1 Corinthians chapter twelve, Paul reinforced this same concept. Every part of the body is essential to the well-being of the body. When one member fails to do his part, the body suffers.

There are two important corollaries to this truth that spiritual gifts equip the Christian to carry out his unique contribution to the body.

First, spiritual gifts are not primarily given to benefit the individual, but the entire body. Anyone who seeks a spiritual gift and employs it in order to give himself a kind of spiritual 'high' is missing the point of spiritual gifts. Perhaps this is the most serious criticism of the contemporary tongues movement. Not only has one gift been exalted above all the others, but the primary purpose of this gift seems to be self-edification.

Second, if spiritual gifts are given to enable us to carry out every essential function of the body then we should expect spiritual gifts which correspond to every function described in the Scriptures. This is precisely the case.

While we can see that all are to engage in the exercise of these functions, there are gifts which overlap these functions. It is those who are gifted in these various capacities who will excel in this particular function. If for every area of ministry there are those specially qualified for that ministry, it is vital to that ministry that those specially gifted in that area should be involved in that ministry.

**The Nature of Spiritual Gifts**

In order to accurately describe the nature of spiritual gifts we will make two major assertions, both of which appear paradoxical. Until we understand the truths contained in these paradoxical statements, we shall not understand spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts intertwine the Divine and the Human. To view spiritual gifts in a merely

human dimension leads to a gross misunderstanding of their divine element. Likewise, to view the gifts only from a 'spiritual' perspective will lead to a distorted appraisal. Spiritual gifts are 'spiritual' in nature for they are given by the Holy Spirit to every believer (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Each gift is a manifestation of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7). Spiritual gifts are 'spiritual' in that they are given only to those who are believers in Jesus Christ. Also, spiritual gifts differ from human talents and abilities in that they result in 'spiritual' fruit.

In addition to the divine element in spiritual gifts is the human counterpart. The gift of helps will involve some form of human involvement whether it be in the bringing of a meal, the fixing of a flat tire, or in cleaning up someone's house. The gift of teaching involves the study of the lesson and the preparation of what is going to be taught. Administration involves sitting down and making plans, calling meetings and evaluation of progress. The gift of giving includes the making of the money, the choice of where it is to be distributed and the actual follow-through of giving.

It has been said that spiritual gifts must not be confused with natural talents, and surely we must agree. But we must also insist that spiritual gifts not be divorced from natural talents and abilities. In Psalm 139, we are reminded that it was God who fashioned us in the womb. Whatever our capabilities or weaknesses, they were given to us by the omniscient God who designed us not only in the matter of spiritual gifts, but also in the matter of talents and abilities to carry out a certain task. Human abilities alone will never produce eternal fruit, but our abilities when empowered by the Holy Spirit can bring about spiritual fruit. It is no accident that Billy Graham is a gifted speaker in the human sense. But there are countless gifted speakers who have never seen a soul won to Christ.

Finally, spiritual gifts should be viewed on the human plane in that they, just as natural talents and abilities, must be developed. One may have the gift of teaching but that gift needs to be developed, perhaps by seminary studies, certainly by some kind of training and much experience. Paul told Timothy,

... kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

Perhaps the best analogy of this interweaving of the divine and the human in the matter of spiritual gifts is that of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was fully human and yet at the same time He was fully God. Divinity and humanity in one person. So also the Scriptures are the work of both God and men. Men spoke and wrote, revealing their backgrounds, education, personalities and styles, and yet these men were moved along by the Holy Spirit in such a way that every word these men wrote was the Word of God (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Spiritual gifts produce unity through diversity. Most Christians have failed to grasp the great diversity revealed in spiritual gifts. The key text is found in 1 Corinthians chapter 12:

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of

effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

Most Christians would agree that there is diversity in the gifts which are given to men. One may have the gift of helps, while another the gift of administration, and so on. I am no longer completely convinced that the New Testament necessarily records every possible spiritual gift, so perhaps there is even greater diversity in gifts than we have thought. But the point I wish to underscore is that even among those who possess the same gift there is great diversity. This is what Paul meant in verses 5 and 6 when he said that there are varieties of ministries and effects.

There are infinite possibilities for ministry for those who possess the gift of teaching. “Ministries” in verse 5 refers to the sphere in which the particular gift is to be exercised. One may use his gift of teaching in a pastoral role in the local church, while another teaches in a seminary. One may teach a junior Sunday school class while another may teach informally around the lunch table at his place of work. One may teach in Africa, while another will teach in North Dallas. When we think of the gift of teaching, all too often we have some stereotyped concept of what the sphere of this teaching will be, but Paul tells us we must keep an open mind to infinite possibilities for exercising this gift.

I have heard it said that there is no such gift as the gift of teaching young people. I would have to agree that there is only one gift of teaching, but that the sphere of ministry for a given individual may be teaching young people, while for another gifted individual that sphere of ministry may be teaching the aged in a retirement home. If we are to properly use our spiritual gifts we must not only identify the gift we possess, but also the sphere of ministry God has ordained for us.

There is yet another dimension of diversity in spiritual gifts. Even when two men have the same gift of teaching, and employ that gift in almost identical situations, there will be diversity in the ‘effects’ or results of that teaching. One man may be exceptionally gifted, while the other only moderately so. One evangelist may win hundreds to Christ and another thousands, while another wins only several dozen. The effectiveness of each man’s gifts will vary. The practical implications of this are many and we shall deal with some of them later.

All of this diversity and variety contributes to Christian unity rather than contradicts it. The very fact of such diversity necessitates unity and interdependence. This interplay between diversity and unity is illustrated by the story told by Donald Grey Barnhouse:

Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton, and when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kasprzyzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kasprzyzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their

graduation, they planned to practice law together.<sup>24</sup>

### **Common Misconceptions of Spiritual Gifts**

Before we go on to the subject of discovering your gift, I want to take a moment to deal with some of the most common errors we make related to spiritual gifts.

#### **Confusing Spiritual Gifts With Spirituality**

The great error of the carnal Corinthian church was to confuse spiritual gifts with spirituality. Those who spoke in tongues thought themselves to be several notches higher on the spiritual scale than those who did not have this gift. The Corinthian church was apparently an exceptionally gifted church, but it was also one of the most carnal churches in the New Testament. My friend, you may not be comforted in hearing this but the man who has the gift of pastor-teacher may be far less spiritual than the one who has the gift of helps. The one with the gift of giving may be far more spiritual than the evangelist who is winning thousands to Christ. We need only recall the Old Testament figure, Sampson, to be reminded that while he was performing great feats of strength he was living a life devoted to the flesh.

#### **Our Spiritual Gift Excuses Us From Other Responsibilities**

The watchword of the Christian sluggard is ‘that’s not my gift.’ My pet peeve is the pastor-teacher who maintains that his sole obligation is to prepare for sermons. He has no time for counseling those who are struggling with life, no time to visit the sick, no time to comfort the mourning. That mentality is an abuse of the biblical teaching concerning spiritual gifts.

We have demonstrated that every gift relates to a function that is the responsibility of every Christian. Although some are gifted to give, all Christians are to give cheerfully to the Lord. While some are gifted to be leaders or administrators, every man is to be a leader in his home, and every woman needs to lead as well (cf. Proverbs 31). While our spiritual gift necessitates that we establish priorities, we are never excused from the responsibilities of all Christians. We are foolish to spend great amounts of time as the chairman of a committee if we are not gifted as an administrator. We would spend our time much more profitably in the area of our gift. But let us be careful about excusing ourselves from tasks for which we are responsible. We may not be gifted at leading people to Christ, but we are to be witnesses for our Lord Jesus.

#### **Obsession for Knowledge About Spiritual Gifts**

Although I have already stressed the importance of knowing our spiritual gifts, I want to make it clear that knowledge is not so important that we neglect service. There is in my estimation far too much intellectualism in the Christian church. Such was the case in Corinth as well. Paul had to say to them, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (1 Corinthians 8:1, my translation). Many Christians insist upon knowing what their spiritual gifts are before they begin to serve God in any capacity. They are more

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<sup>24</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Words Fitly Spoken*, p. 155, as quoted by Gary Inrig, *Life in His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1975), p. 34.

interested in studying and knowing than in serving. It is no wonder that Paul had to insert his chapter (13) on love in the midst of his teaching on spiritual gifts. It is my contention that we learn our spiritual gifts as we serve. If we devote ourselves to the service of others, we will inevitably learn what our gifts are. I am not negating the importance of study or doctrine; I am simply saying that our motive should be to learn to serve, not to study simply to learn.

### **Defining Spiritual Gifts in Terms of the Spectacular**

One of the things which distresses me most about spiritual gifts is the way we define the various gifts by the use of giants of the faith. The gift of teaching is the gift of Dr. Robinson, the gift of faith is the gift of George Müller, the gift of giving is the gift of Le Tourneau, the gift of evangelism is the gift of Billy Graham. We have made two serious mistakes. One is that we have focused upon extraordinary gifts, and most of us are not going to get close to their level of effectiveness. A person who wins several to Christ in a year would not dare to suggest that his gift was the same as that of Billy Graham. A woman with the gift of faith who is trusting God to get her husband through seminary would not think of claiming to possess the same gift as George Müller.

In addition to confusing the effectiveness of different individuals with the same spiritual gift, we also ignore the different spheres of ministry which God has for the same gift. We erroneously suppose that evangelism must take place in a coliseum, rather than around a coffee table. We think teaching must be done behind a pulpit, rather than on the back porch. It is no wonder that many Christians seriously question whether or not they possess some spiritual gift. It is often because they are trying to measure their gifts against the giants. Far more reasonable is the approach of measuring our abilities and gifts against the average Christian.

### **How Can I Discover My Spiritual Gift(s)?**

Drawing all that we have said together, let's consider how one can learn what his or her spiritual gift may be.

First, I hope you have concluded that this matter is not the great mystery we have made it out to be. God has given you a gift or gifts and He intends for you to know your gift, to develop it and to use it for His glory. Gifts are not classified or top secret material intended only for the spiritual elite.

Second, arrive at a simple and concise definition for each of the spiritual gifts recorded in the Scriptures. The gift of faith is the supernatural ability to trust God. Faith is both active and passive. The housewife, for example, may demonstrate active faith by trusting God to establish a coffee-type Bible study for the gals in the neighborhood. The husband may exercise active faith in stepping out into a new type of business venture that will bring additional opportunities for ministry. Passive faith is faith which hangs on for dear life. The seminary wife with the gift of faith may demonstrate her passive faith when all the obstacles point to her husband throwing in the towel and quitting seminary, but she keeps encouraging him to trust. These kinds of faith benefit the body by encouraging others to trust the Lord both actively and passively.

Whatever you do, do not define the gifts in terms of the spectacular. Rather, define the gifts as they relate to you and your situation. Consider how the gift of faith would manifest itself in your situation, on the job, at home, in your responsibilities in the church?

Third, and most important, obey the Scriptures. Corresponding to every spiritual gift is an imperative or instruction to every Christian to carry out that function. The reason why most Christians don't know what their spiritual gift is, is that they have never tried to do it yet.

If you were to ask me what I thought your natural abilities were, the first thing I would do is to ask what you have tried. Have you ever tried to play baseball, to water ski, to bowl, to sew? If you haven't you will never know. You may study sewing, baseball, bowling or whatever, but you will never know if you are good at it until you have made a genuine effort to do it. The general imperatives of the Scriptures have made it easy for us. They command us to do everything which corresponds to some spiritual gift.

In your obedience to the Scriptures, do the things which you see need to be done. I believe it is almost impossible for one with the gift of teaching not to show his hand at a discussion-type Bible study. There is virtually no way you can keep a gifted teacher quiet. He senses a need to teach, and, if given the chance, he meets that need by sharing what he knows to be God's answer. The one with the gift of giving is the one who is most sensitive to financial needs. He senses needs that go over every one else's heads. The same is true of the administrator. He will sense the lack of organization and immediately move in to meet that need. It is my contention that with every spiritual gift comes the complimentary ability to discern the need as well as the ability to meet it.

It is Bill Gothard who suggests that individuals react to given situations in the light of their gifts. If a waitress spills someone's meal all over the restaurant floor and a group of Christians are sitting nearby, each individual will react in accordance with this spiritual gift. The gift of mercy responds by concentrating on cleaning up the mess, the gift of giving offers to pay for another meal, the gift of exhortation seeks to cheer up the waitress. The gift of administration delegates and organizes the whole matter to avoid confusion. The gift of teaching suggests some ways to avoid a recurrence of the problem. Your spiritual gift makes you sensitive to certain needs that others may not perceive. Do what you see needs to be done.

Fourth, devote yourself to what you do best. When you once begin to meet the needs which you see you will quickly discover that you do some things better than others. As I have said before, the fact that you do not do some things very well is no indication that you are to cease altogether in that area. But this will be a clue as to where you should concentrate your efforts. On the basis of your own evaluation and the suggestions of those you respect, begin to devote more time and energy to the things you do best. This leads to the development of the gifts which you possess. Whatever opportunities come up which will aid you in enhancing your spiritual gifts, make the most of them. You may learn that a job change will help you develop your gift. For example, if your gift is teaching, you may well consider a teaching occupation that will enhance your abilities in teaching. If you are particularly skillful in counseling, you may be able to find a job that

gives you additional opportunities to develop this ability.

### **Summary**

Now let's try to draw all that has been said together. Spiritual gifts are no mystery. They are not spiritual meat, but baby food. You can know your gift; indeed, you must know your gift to be a faithful steward. You must recognize the great variety and diversity not only between gifts, but within individuals who possess the same gift. There is diversity not only in the kinds of gifts, but also in the sphere of ministry of your gift and in the degree of success you will have with your gift. Don't make the mistake of measuring yourself with the superstars of spiritual gifts. And don't confuse spirituality with the greatness of your gift (or the lack of it). If you would discover your gift, simply obey the Scriptures by doing the things which you see need to be done, and devote yourself to what you and others agree you do best.

The greatest danger in my opinion of the exceptionally gifted person is that they will let their gift go to their head. The greatest danger for those whose gifts seem insignificant is to despise the abilities that God has given them, and to fail to use their gifts thinking they will never be missed (Matt. 25:24-30). The success of the body is proportional to the effective working of each and every member (Ephesians 4:16).

It is possible that you are considering spiritual gifts, when in reality you have never come to receive the gift of salvation through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. All of God's gifts are gifts of grace in that we do not earn them; they are given in spite of us, rather than because of us. You cannot receive spiritual gifts until you have first received the gift of salvation. You must accept the verdict of God that you are a sinner in rebellion against God and deserving of eternal punishment. You must come to the point where you recognize that nothing you can ever do will ever merit God's eternal salvation. God's gift of salvation is made possible through the sinless life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in the sinner's place. If you trust in Him as the one who died for you, who took your punishment and exchanged your sin for His righteousness, you, too, can receive the gift of salvation. When you have done this, you will also discover that God has also given you the gift of His Spirit and the spiritual ability to contribute to the ongoing work of His body, the church.