

## The Measure Of Christ'S Gift

Call to Unity

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Tomorrow is the day of Pentecost and it is a holy feast day deeply related to ultimate unity. Notice what Luke wrote regarding that Pentecost when the church received the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The phrase in Acts 2:1, “with one accord,” is translated from the Greek word, “homothumadon.” This word is very expressive; it signifies that *all* their minds, cares, and desires were concentrated on one thing. Everyone had the same purpose in mind, and had only one objective. They were all unified!

No one was uninterested—none were unconcerned, none were lukewarm; they *all* were serious about being together to worship God on Pentecost; and the Spirit of God came down to meet their united faith. When an assembly of God's people meet in the same spirit, we can expect that the spiritual blessings that are needed will be provided.

It is Jesus Christ who is the giver of every gift in the church. And, God's ultimate goal and purpose is to re-unite in one all things. One of the primary functions and responsibilities of the church is to manifest this. That is why each of us individually must be careful always to preserve the unity and to guard it. God's church is always unified; the question is, “Are you unified with the family of God?”

The apostle Paul explains how Christ Himself has done certain things to promote and encourage that unity in order to safeguard it.

**Ephesians 4:1-6** I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

So we are to work hard to guard that unity! That is what endeavor means—to keep the existing unity alive and well. There must be peace in the church to accomplish this. The fruit of the Spirit is sown in peace. Therefore, each and every one of us has certain responsibilities and duties to perform in the church that we are given by Christ.

**Ephesians 4:7-11** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." [Love and the Holy Spirit are two of the greatest primary gifts; and in addition, or as the result of them, is unity.] (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

The word "but", in verse 7, is a conjunction that implies a contrast, but at the same time it refers us back to that which has gone before. The apostle Paul is continuing from the beginning of the chapter with the subject of the unity of the church; he is still working out his exhortation to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'.

Beginning in verse 7, Paul is looking at unity in a slightly different way than he did in the first six verses of this chapter; he is looking at another aspect of the subject. That is why he uses this specific word "but". It is essential that he describes unity from different aspects to give us a balanced sense and conception of what unity means.

There is always the danger of our thinking of unity in terms of uniformity. Our tendency is to think of unity as consisting of a number of things that are absolutely identical in every single respect, with no difference at all, such as a sheet of postage stamps.

Paul is determined to show us that is not true unity. Unity is much greater than that; it is a much grander thing. Any conception of unity that equates it with uniformity detracts from the essential greatness and glory of unity. In other words, unity is not something mechanical; it does not mean sameness. It is very difficult for us, living at the present time, to grasp this point. We are accustomed to mass-production—articles coming out of a machine one after another, all exactly the same. And they are meant to be identical. This is not only true of machinery and manufactured goods; there are obvious tendencies in the world today to think in the same way regarding human beings.

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This is not entirely new; it has characterized certain educational establishments that have produced a mass product, a distinct type of individuals, all of whom conform to the same behavior pattern in manner and speech and other respects. Each one has 'the stamp' upon him, and others are more aware of the type than of the individual himself, except in certain unusual individuals. This is not surprising, because the herd instinct is powerful in all of us by nature.

Paul discounts this uniformity view and shows that unity is something living and vital and dynamic, something that is almost staggering in its variety. This is certainly the very special and most wonderful aspect of spiritual unity.

In verses 4-6 Paul uses the word 'one' seven times—'one spirit, one body, one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all', and thereby establishes the great principle of unity. The New Testament teaching about unity is such that having emphasized the oneness seven times, he can immediately go on to say, 'but to each one of us'. We have not become merged into a solid and indistinguishable mass; we have *not* lost our identity. We are still our individual selves.

Notice the variety of personalities and characteristics of the apostles; they had many similar qualities but they also had their own unique personalities and idiosyncrasies.

Let us look at them very briefly.

**Andrew**, did not have the boldness and rocklike robustness of Peter's character, but he did have that feature that makes him a pattern within the reach of everyone. He had a simple, earnest determination in carrying out the dictates of his conscience. And, he was as fervent and devoted as any to preach the gospel.

**Bartholomew**, was conspicuous for his transparency. Early on he had a narrow prejudice in him, (He said, "Can there anything good come out of Nazareth?") but when the Savior was revealed to him immediately his prejudice gave place to conviction. Like Jacob, he wrestled alone with God in prayer under the fig tree. He was called, "an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile". No slyness.

**James**, *son of Alpheus* rendered obscure service. He grew up as a skeptical unbeliever. Following his conversion he appears to have been head of the church at Jerusalem. He was the author of an epistle. He was encouraging and concerned for brethren under trials.

**James**, *son of Zebedee* became known as great. His temperament was warm and

impetuous. He was called one of the "sons of thunder" because of his boldness and energy and zeal. He was steadfast and faithful even at the threat of death and he was the first martyr among the apostles, having been beheaded by King Herod Agrippa.

**John** personified love. His temperament was impetuous early on, but warm, compassionate, and caring. He was also called one of the "sons of thunder" because of his boldness and energy and zeal. He thought deeply and wrote about spiritual principles, especially regarding love.

**Matthew** (Levi) initially was a tax collector and possibly a man of wealth. His job and business sense would have developed organizational and management abilities in him; and he probably helped brethren with their financial difficulties; also he was able to deal more easily with hard to reach publicans and sinners. He was probably more business-like.

**Matthias** was chosen by lot to succeed Judas Iscariot as an apostle. Matthias had been a follower of Jesus from the beginning of His ministry until the day of His ascension, and he had been a witness of His resurrection. In this way and more he fulfilled the requirements of apostleship. He had to have been a patient, dedicated, faithful, and humble man.

**Peter** was emotional at times. His hard life as a fisherman prepared him to work hard and diligently, and with endurance. He was energetic and bold. Initially he was impulsive, vacillating and stubborn, but once faithfully joined to Christ he became unshaken and steadfast.

**Philip** seemed slow-witted. Initially, instead of responding in faith, Philip logically began to calculate the food it would take to feed the five thousand, and the cost. Sometimes he asked abrupt questions. He was devout and possibly athletic since he ran at full speed to overtake a chariot. He longed to be part of Christ's inner circle.

**Simon** the Canaanite (Simon the Zealot) was a revolutionist. As a Zealot, Simon would have disdained any foreign domination or interference. The Zealots were conspicuous for their fierce advocacy of the Mosaic ritual. He probably had an intense and determined personality.

**Thaddeus** (Judas the Zealot) was probably similar to Simon, but all we know of this apostle is that he had three names and asked Jesus a sixteen-word question. Christ sent him forth to preach God's message and assist in His miraculous ministry. He was a minor personality that we know little about.

Even if mostly behind the scenes, each apostle had his own special commission from Christ.

**Thomas** was the most maligned. He demonstrated his devoted love on the one hand, ready to follow Jesus to death, and on the other hand, suffered from slowness to believe. When he missed out on Christ's revelation of His hands and His side following His resurrection, Thomas said with unbelief and an unreasonable demand that he wanted proof seen by his own eyes. He later acknowledged that Jesus was truly the Son of God. After his doubts were removed his faith, loyalty, and dedication grew from there.

This brief summary of the lives of the apostles is not meant to criticize or denigrate any of them; it is meant to show that each was a unique individual who had similar weaknesses to overcome, and similar strengths to build on as we do.

They all had human nature to conquer; and Christ gave them, as He does us, the grace and spiritual gifts to accomplish God's will. Whether great or small, each apostle had his own personality, failures, and successes; each also had his own special office of responsibility; and this is also true of each individual member of God's church today.

We are regarded as single personalities, but must think of ourselves as units in a whole. The amazing and astonishing fact is that, as Christians, though we are all 'one,' we can nevertheless be addressed as the apostle Paul did in Ephesians 4:7 in the phrase 'each one of us'.

The explanation is this: We are all 'one' in Christ. We are all one in the matter of our salvation and as children of God. We are all one as many members of one body of Christ. That is what Paul is emphasizing and stressing.

Every individual Christian is being saved in exactly the same manner as everyone else. Paul's salvation is no different from any other Christian's salvation. All conversions are essentially the same. In a sense, the special and particular circumstances, the particular details, are irrelevant. Regeneration is done by God through His Spirit. It is a miracle in every single case, and it is always the same miracle.

**Titus 3:4-7** But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we

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should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

As children of God, and as members of the household of God, there is no difference. Think of a family, a large family; some may be boys, some girls, but all are equally children. The boys are no more children than the girls, and the girls no more so than the boys.

They may differ greatly in many respects, but that does not make the slightest difference to their relationship, to the fact that they are children, to the fact that they are in this peculiar relationship to their father. The image and illustration of the body clearly conveys the same concept and idea.

**Ephesians 4:7** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

In those aspects we are all identical, we are all one, and we are all the same. But our unity does not mean that we are identical in every single respect. Paul says, "to each one of us." In this expression he is introducing the variety and the difference and the variety and variation. The special glory of the unity is that it is a unity in variety, a unity that comprehends variation and variability. We are essentially one, but in many respects we differ.

The variety does *not* break the unity; and the unity does *not* do away with the variety. This is a special glory, a miracle of deliverance. It is a special phenomenon that the church is to manifest and demonstrate.

Paul emphasizes these obvious differences in the members of the body, that is, in the members of the church: "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

The question that confronts us is: How can this great unity, that Paul emphasized so much, possibly be preserved in the light of this variety and variation? It is a question he answers immediately, beginning in verse 7 and continuing to the end of verse 16.

In Ephesians 4 Paul paints a picture of the church showing how the church is characterized by these twin elements of unity and variety. He leads us into the secret of it all showing how it comes to pass in the experience and activity of the church.

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Paul lays down the principle in the words: "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." The controlling principle is that Jesus Christ Himself is the Head of the church and is the Giver of the variety of gifts that are enjoyed by the church as a whole and by every single member specifically.

This is the principle that guarantees the unity in the variety. Paul works the same principle in I Corinthians 12. He does this in this instance in terms of the Spirit. It amounts to the same thing, because it is Jesus Christ who gives the Spirit, and He gives His gifts through the Spirit.

**I Corinthians 12:4-7** There are diversities [varieties] of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.

There we have precisely the same central and controlling principle. The gifts have a unity in their source, and they also have a unity in their purpose. They are not given for personal enrichment, as much as for the benefit of others.

The word "manifestation" in verse 7 means that which makes something obvious, conspicuous, or plain; it illustrates, or makes something seen or known. In light of this, conduct manifests the state of the heart; and actions are an expression or revelation of real feelings.

There are gifts, endowments, or graces given that "manifest" the work and nature of the power of the Holy Spirit working on a saint's mind. All that is produced in the mind by the Spirit is a manifestation of God's character and will in a similar way as the works of God in the visible creation are a manifestation of His perfect attributes.

**Romans 1:20 ESV** For his [God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.

Now back to Ephesians 4:

**Ephesians 4:8-10** Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the

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earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

But now a question arises that requires an explanation. It is something that is very characteristic of the apostle Paul. He says in verse 7, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." It seems it would have been more normal for Paul to continue from here with verse 11, "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

But he does not. It is what he does say, and clearly intends to say; but he interrupts himself and inserts the contents of verses 8, 9, and 10. These verses constitute a kind of parenthesis, and it is that which is characteristic of Paul's method as a writer. But why does he use this insertion method?

He had mentioned the name of Christ in verse 7. The mention of the name of Christ immediately enlivens him and fires him up. He cannot restrain himself, and he pours out these verses with this tremendous statement about our Lord and Savior. This is important because it illustrates the fact that the apostle Paul so loved his Savior that the very mention of His name always moved him to the depths of his being.

The very mention of Christ's name causes him to interrupt his present train of thought to glorify Him once more. In doing so, he becomes guilty of perpetrating a literary offense known as an anacoluthon. These anacolutha, which are very characteristic of Paul's style, constitute an interruption of an argument or a statement by another statement and then a return to, and a continuation of, the original idea.

In the KJV verses 9 and 10 are placed in brackets, and rightly so in a sense. The first bracket should appear at verse 8. It appears that what led to the parenthesis was something like this... Paul mentioned in the original statement in verse 7 that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church and that He is the giver and the dispenser of all the gifts.

This leads him not only to ascribe glory to Christ but also to show us how Christ ever came into the position to be able to do this. Why is Christ Head of the church? Why is He the giver of all the gifts? How has the Son of God arrived at the particular position that entitles Him to do this?

This is the question that is answered in verses 8 through 10.

We can analyze the statement in the following manner. The first thing Paul says is that the statement he has just made should not surprise us, because it has all been foretold and prophesied in the Old Testament. Paul quotes from Psalm 68:

**Psalm 68:18-19** You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there. Blessed be the Lord, who daily loads us with benefits, the God of our salvation! Selah

Paul's point is that his statement about grace given to each one of us as Christians by Jesus Christ must not be thought of as something that had suddenly come into the mind of God. On the contrary, it was always a part of God's plan of redemption, and of His purpose with respect to the church. God had actually revealed it to the psalmist about ten centuries previously.

The first thing we note is that the quotation in verse 8 of Psalm 68 is a reference to the God of the Old Testament, YHWH. This is true of the entire psalm. For example we read:

**Psalm 68:4-5** Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name Yah [which is short for YHWH], and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation.

**Psalm 68:17** The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the Holy Place.

**Psalm 68:18** You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there.

In this psalm David is extolling the name of God; and he does so because of a great victory God had just given him. His own victory reminds him that it is not the only victory God has given His people. That sends him back to the story of the children of Israel coming out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea, the destruction of Pharaoh and his army, and the journey through the wilderness and the entry into Canaan. The psalmist

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says that all these are the victories of God.

The psalmist said that God ascended into heaven. That is what David said. There in Ephesians 4:8, Paul ascribes it all to Jesus Christ. He is referring to the gift of Christ.

**Ephesians 4:8** Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

Paul is talking about Christ and the church, whereas the psalmist is talking about YHWH, the member of the God Family who became Jesus Christ. We must always bear in mind that when we read the Bible, we often find a double meaning in statements in the Old Testament. This is true of the Psalms; it is equally true of many of the prophets and their writings.

In Psalm 68 the first thing in David's mind was a local historical event, a contemporary happening that he decides to write about. But because he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and thereby an inspired man, he is led on to something beyond the time then present.

David realized this, but he is led by the Spirit to higher truth. Inspiration leads David to describe the local circumstance in such a way that it becomes also a perfect foreshadowing of that which is going to happen later. It is a prophecy of Christ; it is an accurate and exact description of what happened to Jesus Christ Himself. Similarly the prophets wrote for their own day and generation; they had a local and an immediate message; but it did not stop at that. Coupled with it were the greater message and the prophetic message concerning the coming of the Messiah. The immediate and the local also contained the remote and the greater.

Our first principle, then, is that the psalmist, under divine inspiration, saw in the local event a picture and foreshadow of the coming of the Son of God and what He was going to do. This is one of the great proofs of the inspiration of the Scriptures.

In the second place it is equally clear that Paul's teaching is that Jesus Christ is YHWH, the JAH of whom David writes. In the Old Testament there are references to His coming down to help people. We recall also how Paul, in I Corinthians 10, says that Christ was the Rock that followed the children of Israel, the Rock who gave them water.

**I Corinthians 10:1-5** Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were

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baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

The martyr Stephen likewise, in his great address when he was on trial, says that Christ was with the children of Israel, 'the church in the wilderness'. In other words the teaching is that Christ is YHWH.

You cannot say of the Father that 'He received gifts for men'. You cannot say of the Father that He ascended, because He is always in heaven and always has been there. There is only One of whom we can say that He ascended up on high, and that is, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is **not** a created being. The Son subordinated Himself for the work of salvation.

There is also another matter for our consideration. Psalm 68:18 is not identical with the quotation in Ephesians.

**Ephesians 4:8** Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."

But in Psalm 68:18, we find that he 'received gifts among men', not that He gave them, but that He received them. This again is important. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament the word is "received," and in the Septuagint, it is also translated received. But here Paul writes 'gave.' This seems to conflict with the inspiration of the Scripture.

How can we say that Paul is definitely writing as one inspired when he seems to misquote this Old Testament scripture? The clever critics argue that this disposes of our claim for the authority of Scripture and especially of the infallibility of Scripture.

But the answer is quite clear, and there is no contradiction here. It is true to say about Jesus Christ that He both 'received' and 'gave'. Here is what the apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem.

**Acts 2:33** Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

He has received, and He 'poured out' or, gave; it is one action. The same Person receives and gives; the giving presupposes the receiving. But how does this agree with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? The answer is that it is the same Holy Spirit who inspired David when he wrote the psalm as inspired the apostle Paul when he wrote the fourth chapter of this letter to the Ephesians; what he does in both cases is to show that all the gifts that come to the church come from and through Jesus Christ.

In the one instance He emphasizes that it is the Father who gives them to the Son, in the other, he emphasizes that it is the Son who gives them to the church, and her individual members. There is no contradiction; both statements are true.

It is here that we see so clearly the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. There are other examples in the New Testament where the Old Testament statements are quoted but not in the absolutely identical words. The gifts are given to the church through, and by Jesus Christ.

Paul was well aware of what was stated in Psalm 68:18, both in the original Hebrew and in the Greek Septuagint translation, and yet, under the inspiration of the Spirit, he says, 'gave'. He is emphasizing the one action, receiving and giving. The Son is always the great Mediator.

This brings us to a final comment on what we may call the mechanical aspect of this parenthetical statement before we go on to draw out the doctrine that is taught here. The final phrase from Ephesians 4:7 and Psalm 68:18 reads, 'He led captivity captive'.

In ancient times, if a king or a prince or a great military leader waged successful combat, when he came back to his own country there was always a kind of victory parade. The conquered kings and princes and military leaders were all made to walk in the procession in their chains. The conqueror was 'leading captivity captive'. He had taken his enemy captive and was now making a public display of them. At the same time he threw gifts to his own people. He was riding in his chariot distributing his bounty among the acclaiming people, and he was leading these conquered men as captives at the same time. That seems to be the picture here.

This is a picture of Jesus Christ leading in His triumphal train: Satan and sin and death—the great enemies that were against mankind and which had held mankind in captivity for so long. The evil princes who had controlled that captivity are now being led captive themselves, although they do not realize it yet.

So, Paul is telling us that Jesus Christ came into the world to deal with and to conquer

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our enemies, and having finished His campaign, and having routed them, He has returned to heaven leading all these enemies captive, and showering His gifts upon us, His acclaiming people.

The spiritual side of this has been and is being accomplished; and the literal realization of this will be completed following the resurrection of the firstfruits and the marriage supper and at Christ's return to set up God's Kingdom on the earth.

Paul was not content to leave it at that point. But the great thing we must hold in our minds is that the principle of unity is emphasized by the fact that Christ is the dispenser, the giver of the gifts. He is the great heavenly King and we are His people. Having routed His enemies, He dispenses and showers His gifts upon us.

**Ephesians 4:7, 11** But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . . And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

Now let us turn our attention to these two specific verses. We have been considering the parenthesis in verses 8 through 10 because it is essential that we understand its teaching if we are to truly understand the teaching of these two verses which surround it.

Paul, having written the statement in verse 7, instead of going on immediately to explain what exactly Christ does give, first explains how He is in the position to do this. We should also remind ourselves that the fundamental theme of this entire section is that of unity of the church.

Paul is also concerned to show that this unity does not imply a drab mechanical sameness, but a unity in variety, the result of the work of Jesus Christ, as the Head of the church, has done on behalf of His people.

In these two verses Paul begins to work out this principle in detail in the life and the activity of the church. This theme is a very important one, and especially important at the present time when there is so much ineffective talk and writing about the church and unity.

To their own detriment, people are just too preoccupied with the trials in their own lives and too distracted with temptations in Satan's society to truly care very much about being unified with God's church. It is important to note that the apostle Paul does not lay

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down a rigid system of church order here. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that certain principles are laid down that we are meant to observe and to practice.

So, we must be careful to avoid two dangers. The one danger is to go beyond the scripture and to impose some rigid, legal, mechanical system of order upon the church. The other danger is, that in our fear of being pharisaical, we would humanly reason to have no organized system at all, making it impossible to do everything 'decently and in order' as per I Corinthians 14:40.

Now let us examine these principles. The first is that Christ alone is the Head of the church according to the will of His Father. There is only one King of kings and there is only one High Priest of the church. No man or woman can ever be head of the church.

Wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ's name, He is there. But we must never forget this important principle: that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together with other brethren.

**Hebrews 10:24-25** And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

The day is approaching; the writing is on the walls. The church is a family; and family must look out for the best interests and welfare of other family members. Find a church home and stick with it like glue unless false doctrine is being taught.

Never in the history of mankind on such a global scale has this been so important to realize. The existing corrupt world Babylonian system is unraveling and everyone's life is about to be affected dramatically. It is crucial for us to watch and pray about discerning the times.

Christ warned:

**Mark 13:33** Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

**Luke 21:36** Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before

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the Son of Man."

Christ is Head, and we are the body and members individually. Why would the body not want to be where the Head is? So if it is a weekly Sabbath, or a holy day, you better be where Christ the Head is, or, you are not a living part of the church.

**I Corinthians 12:18-20** But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.

The second principle is that the church consists of members, each having a function under the Head. Remember what is stated in Ephesians 4:7, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." When Paul says 'grace given' he is not referring to the grace of salvation, because he had already dealt with that subject. He is concerned now with the functioning of the church as the body of Christ.

Obviously, every baptized member of God's church has been given the grace of salvation, otherwise we are not in the church at all, but then in verse 11, as the expression 'and He gave some, apostles' indicates that Paul's theme is the grace given to every individual member of the church enabling him or her to perform some specific function.

A specific function is given to each one and with it He gives the ability to exercise that specific function. The analogy of the body makes this quite clear. Every specific part in my body has some function to perform. We do not always know what the function is; but the fact that we may not know does not mean that it does not have a function.

Scientists and medical doctors have fallen into error concerning this matter. Not too long ago, there were those who, believing the theory of evolution, were saying quite dogmatically that the thyroid gland had no function, but that it was one of a number of vestigial remains. They spoke similarly concerning various other ductless glands.

But today we know that these glands perform vital functions. Such people are still saying that the appendix has no necessary function, but what they really mean is that they do not know what it is. They are just now starting to discover that *all* the parts of the human body have very important necessary functions.

The point I am interested in emphasizing is that there is nothing in the body—nothing—even in the smallest cell or genome, not a single hair that does not have a function, a purpose. It may appear to be very insignificant in and of itself; but it is in the body and it works with the other elements and has its part to play.

*You* are in the body of Christ! *You* are important to the other members of the body, especially to the Head! *You* have a vital part to play!

A fatal tendency of people is to think and to say that the vast majority of people in the church are meant to be entirely passive. Often people seem to think of or to act like the church as just a building to which they come to sit and listen to messages and sermons, and in which they do nothing. This is a denial of the fundamental gift offered to every one of us in the church and as parts of the body of Christ.

Everything associated with God's church is dynamic, lively, vibrant, and full of life. Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and the body. Every one of us has a dynamic function, and we are not meant to be entirely passive. The whole secret of the working of the human body is that every part and particle has a specific living function that it is meant to fulfill.

The first thing we have to do, therefore, is to discover what our function is. As we realize this we discover what a privilege it is to be members of God's church. The glory of our position is that in this body, which Christ is forming through the Spirit according to God's will, we all have a vital part and an essential place.

In I Corinthians 12 we are reminded of some of these functions, but Paul does not supply us with an exhaustive list. There is some specific position that every one of us is called to occupy, and in which to work.

So as we believe in Christ, and function in the church, and as we believe that the church is the custodian and guardian of the only message in this sinful world that can save mankind, our first duty is to discover what our function is and to exercise it. This function may *appear* to be unimportant, but that does not matter; the vital thing is that there is something for every one of us to do, "To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

The third principle is that it is Christ Himself who gives each one of us this precise grace. Paul emphasizes this point in Ephesians 4:7 and 11. The grace is given to us 'according to the measure of Christ's gift'.

In verse 11, sadly, the KJV does not bring out the meaning and reads, 'And He gave

some, apostles'. But the right and better translation is, 'And He Himself gave some to be apostles'. It is emphatic; not 'He' but 'He Himself', so that we do not fail to realize and to remember that it is Christ Himself who gives all these various gifts.

We come next to the most important practical aspect of this whole matter. From the standpoint of the activities of the church today it is certainly one of the most important questions. In other words, we are going to consider 'the Call'.

Men and women in the church are called to given functions and given the ability to perform them by Christ Himself. We can only deal with some of the principles involved within the scope of this sermon.

The first principle is that we do *not* call ourselves. In John 15:16 Christ said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." We are not to decide to do this or that in the church, as has often been attempted. For example, a man decides that he is going to serve in the church, but he will only do so if it on his terms, or in a visible way. He is not interested in what God's will is; it does not cross his mind. He does what he wants to do for personal gain.

But according to the apostle Paul's teaching a man does not call himself; still less, of course, does he enter the ministry, or any other office in the church, as a profession. It is not just a job. Sometimes people forget that it is God through Christ who calls, and that we ourselves do not decide what we do in the church in any capacity.

**I Corinthians 1:9** God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let us move on from here, and secondly emphasize that 'the need' is *not* 'the call'. It is God through Jesus Christ who does the calling. He may of course call us to do something because of a certain need; but the need cannot be the call, for the good and sufficient reason that if the need constitutes the call, then every one of us should be responding to that need, and that is obviously ridiculous.

The need is not meant to be the call. Christ Himself sees the whole field, and is the Head of the whole body. He sees a need here and a need there, at the same time. He does not see, as we see, in a partial manner; He sees perfectly.

Simply because I see a need in a given place I must not presume to conclude that it is incumbent upon me to satisfy it. It may not be God's will that I do anything about it. He

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may have something else for me to do, and He may will that someone else perform the work that I unwisely rush to undertake.

Over the years some men in the church have seriously neglected their families because they took everything upon themselves, sometimes with the wrong motivation. Often pride was involved; either they were looking for recognition, sometimes it was that they thought they could do a better job than anyone else. Doing everything oneself sometimes cuts others out of opportunities to serve and grow.

The teaching that the need is the call is a denial of the teaching that the Jesus Christ is Head of the church; He is the only One who can give the call, and He gives it directly to us. This is not to say that we should wait for a spiritual vision and realization before we offer to serve. Obviously, we have a responsibility and a duty to serve others when we see a need. But we should not have the attitude of the "social climber," a person who seeks notoriety, position, and control.

The church does not give the call either. It is God who gives the call to draw a person to His church and to redemption. In John 6:44 Jesus says, "No one can come to Me [Christ] unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." It is not the church's responsibility to drag and push people to Christ or to serve Him; as the old adage goes, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Each one of us must be willing to do anything that God through Christ may call us to do. In one sense, God calls us into His church and Christ calls us to a specific function in the church. God and His Son work together in unity to call us. It may be Christ's will that we stay doing something drab and ordinary in the church; and we must find contentment in this. As members of the body of Christ, we are to be at His disposal, to be ready to do anything He calls us to do.

But someone may ask, "How are we to know what we are called to do?" The Scripture provides the answer. It starts with Christ Himself as the One who calls us to duty. Of course, we must not to have the demonic attitude that we desire to climb the ladder of position and power. But in addition, the Scripture shows that what any one of us may regard as a call to responsibility is to be tried and tested. It is here that the church comes in. The church is to discern and to apply certain tests to people.

Take for instance what we find in Acts 6 and also in what are called the Pastoral Epistles, I and II Timothy, and Titus. There we find detailed rules and regulations with regard to elders and deacons and about those who preach and teach. It is the

responsibility of the church to apply these tests.

The apostle Paul says in I Corinthians 14:40, 'Everything must be done decently and in order'—or the ministry will be blamed. There must be no confusion in the church. So we are given these instructions to the church, as a check that assures that we are not misled by a passing impulse.

The very subtle Satan can turn himself into an angel of light in order to confuse us. He tries to counterfeit everything God does including God's ministers and lay-members. Satan has his own false teachers and tares that infiltrate God's church.

Regarding the functions of the lights of the church, Herbert Lockyer wrote this in his book, *All the Apostles of the Bible*:

In the record of creation we read that God made the sun and the moon as two great lights; the sun, the greater light to rule by day, and the moon, the lesser light to rule by night: He made the stars also. God has made other lights also, spiritual lights, and has set them in the firmament of His Holy Word to give light to men. Bible characters are these lights, giving light, not of themselves, but of God. The Lord Himself is the Source of Light, the Light of men, the light of the Word, and those who are His reflect His Light, as lights—lesser lights—of the world.

As among the heavenly bodies, there are greater and lesser lights—the lesser lights, as distinguished from the two great lights, the sun and the moon—so among the characters of Scripture there is a like distinction. Great lights there are such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, standing forth most prominently, and shining most brightly, but there are lesser lights too—minor personalities we know little about. Yet whether great or small, each has his own special office. Just as not one of the stars that spangle the sky could be removed without being missed, so also not one of the lights of Scripture can be disregarded. Each life and character teaches us its own lesson. Guidance and example come from the unknown [or, unseen] as well as the known.

A further comparison is that often the greater in reckoning is not always greater. The greater lights in the sky, with the moon lesser than the sun, only seem greater to us than the stars. Astronomers tell us that the moon is a mere nothing compared with some of the far-distant lights; that the sun is actually less than many twinkling stars millions of miles away. Is this not likewise true with some of the less-known saints on earth who may be great in the sight of God as the greatest, shining in His presence above?

In this symbolism the apostles were made up of greater and lesser lights. Peter, for

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instance, was a blazing sun, and more conspicuous than any other disciple in the gospel story. But apostles like Simon the Zealot and Thaddeus are lesser lights, yet they were essential to the plan of God.

A person who is truly called is a humble person who does not set himself up; God does that through Christ and the church. A person is examined over a long period of time and used according to God's will.

Jesus tells us in John 7:24, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." We must be guided by the whole of Scripture as we are given discernment and strength by Christ through the Spirit, to preserve 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' in the church.