

## EPHESIANS 4:7-12

### INTRODUCTION

We have been dealing with the subject of unity over the last few sermons. Now when people think about the word unity they can often make the mistake and confuse unity with uniformity. True bible unity does not mean uniformity it does not mean that every one is the same. The person that unites true believers is the Lord Jesus and he does not make us all the same does he?

He has made us all, as individuals and we are all unique; even though there is a fundamental unity with all mankind there is also a rich diversity in mankind. Well that is the type of unity that Paul is talking about here and in the section we are looking at today Paul is dealing with the subject of unity in the midst of diversity.

### 1. CHRISTIAN UNITY IS ENRICHED BY THE DIVERSITY OF OUR GIFTS (vs. 7-12)

The contrast between verses 6 and 7 is striking. In verse 6 Paul speaks of God as the Father of us all, who is above all through all and in all. Now in verse 7 Paul speaks about the gifts that God grants to us as individuals. Thus Paul turns from 'all' to 'us' he now turns his attention from the unity to diversity of the church. Paul is in fact deliberately qualifying what he has just said about the church's unity. Although there is only one body, one faith one Lord one Spirit one baptism and one hope this unity does not mean that the church is full of clones, the church is not one uniform people but people with rich diversity yet with a fundamental unity in Jesus Christ. The church is full of individual people from different cultures, who have different temperaments and personalities but this is not what makes it so diverse.

Its diversity is seen more in the variety and richness of the gifts, which people possess. These gifts are not natural gifts that one is born with but they are given by Christ and they are given for the enrichment of the church's life together. Although Paul does not mention the word gifts in this passage but instead prefers to talk about Christ's grace in apportioning gifts to us it is clear from the context that Paul is referring to gifts that come to us by the grace of Christ (v 7).

In fact the word 'grace' and 'gifts' come from the same Greek word, grace is 'charis' and gifts is 'charismata.' It is very important to distinguish the difference between grace and gift. Saving grace is given to all who believe whereas what we might call service gifts are given in according with Christ's will. We all have at least one gift but we don't all share the same proportion of gifts some might have more than others and some of our gifts might be given in a greater degree than others. However the unity of the church depends on God's saving grace whereas the diversity of the church depends on God's grace gifts distributed as he pleases to church members. So what do we learn then from this passage about these gifts that enriches our Christian unity through diversity.

a) **The ascended Christ gives these gifts (vs. 7-10)** - According to verse 7 each gift is Christ's gift and this truth is enforced in verse 8 with a quotation from Psalm 68:18. Now Psalm 68 is a call to God to come to the rescue of his people and vindicate

them again as in previous days. According to the Psalm 68 God went in triumph before his people after the exodus (v 7) so that Mount Sinai trembled (v 8) and the Kings were scattered (vs. 11-14).

Then desiring Mount Zion as his abode (v 16) he came from Sinai to his holy place (v 17) and ascended the high mount leading captives in his train. It is all very vivid imagery; it seems that the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem is likened to the triumphant march of God into his capital. Paul now applies this vivid picture to Christ's ascension because he sees the exaltation of Jesus as a further fulfilment of this description of the triumph of God over his enemies.

Christ ascended as conqueror to his Father's right hand and his captives are all the spiritual forces that he has defeated and disarmed via the cross (Colossians 2:15).

This picture of a triumphant possession was a well-known picture in Paul's day. If Roman Generals were immensely successful in war a victorious parade was organised for them on their return to their capital city. Trailing in the triumphal procession would be numbers of captives taken by the General in his battles with the enemy. The General would sit on an elevated chair and give out the plunder seized in war. This would go to those who had fought with him and for him.

Therefore very different gifts would go to differing people. Well Paul takes this well-known event and says that Christ has won an immense victory by his death and resurrection. Now as the ascended Christ and Lord he grants grace gifts to his people unlike the Roman General Christ gives these gifts which do vary to all his people not because they fought the battle for him but out of his grace towards us he gives them to us.

Our ascended Lord rules his church with authority and with power and as such he grants gifts to his church.

Now after the quotation of Psalm 68:18 Paul adds a little footnote in verse 9 a footnote that has caused some controversy among commentators. What does Paul mean by Christ descending into the lower earthly regions? I don't want to go into all the arguments but I think it is referring to his incarnation and his coming into the earth. But why not say the earth if that is what Paul meant.

I think Paul wants to highlight the significance of this coming into the world the humiliation involved in coming into this earth. He being God became man and all that is associated with his life on earth the humiliation of the cross, which Christ endured. This humiliation is followed by his exaltation (v 10) and what an exaltation it was bringing Christ to the position of supreme authority over all things, it is in his position as exalted Lord over all things that he grants to his people grace gifts.

Now it is worth considering that because these gifts are given to the church from Christ and each one of us possesses at least one gift then these gifts are to be used for the purposes for which he gave them mainly the service, extension and edification of the church of Jesus Christ. These gifts are not given to us to use for our own personal ego or for our own selfish goals or to benefit ourselves in some way; no they are to be used for his purposes.

Therefore when you feel that no one in the church appreciates your gift that does not mean that you then cease to use it; if you do that you are saying that the point of my gift is to get congratulations from the church. That's not to say that we should not appreciate one another in the church but it does mean that whatever gift we use in the church must be for him and for his glory.

Of course his people will benefit greatly from your gift and you will benefit by being used in the church by the using your gift but all our gifts must ultimately point people to Jesus and to the glory of God. So why do you use your gifts in this church is it for attention or for a sense of security or for the promotion of your ego or confidence or is it for the glory of God.

**b) These Gifts are Extremely Varied** – Paul here lists some of the gifts that God grants to people for the benefit of the church and for his own glory. He chooses five gifts here and I think the reason why he chooses these five is that they have all got to do with the formation and the continuance of the church. The church at Ephesus knew all of these gifts and so Paul is using them as an illustration of the various gifts that the risen Christ bestows upon his people.

Now I don't want you to think that these are the only gifts that the church needs that is certainly not the case. In fact there are at least 25 different gifts listed in the five passages within the New Testament that lists the various gifts granted to the church by Christ. If you were to examine these lists of gifts you will find a great variety and it seems that the list of gifts is given in a haphazard sort of way indicating that all these lists are only giving some gifts as an illustration of the wide variety of gifts within the church.

So the lists of gifts are not supposed to give a completed list of gifts so that we all must have at least one of these 25 gifts. No there are many more gifts granted to Christians by the risen Lord that are not listed in the Bible. Now let's look at the five gifts Paul has chosen as his example of the variety of gifts within the church.

**i) Apostles** – Now there are no apostles today because an apostle in the New Testament were men chosen and authorised by Christ and to be an apostle you had to be an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ. Therefore there can be no successors to the apostles today. However the Apostolic authority is preserved for us today in the New Testament, which is the essential apostolic succession for the church. An apostle's task was to be an authoritative teacher and interpreter of the Christian faith.

The fact that there are no apostles today does not spoil what the Apostle Paul is saying. Paul's point is that Christ gives differing gifts to people in order to meet differing needs. So in the first century church they needed Apostles men with authority who could structure the church and interpret God's principles for the newborn church of Jesus Christ. In new pioneer situations today God still raises up men with the necessary gifts of proclaiming the gospel and structuring the church in accordance with God written word.

**ii) Prophets** – Prophets were men who spoke directly for God having been given a direct word from God. This sometimes involved a prediction of the future but most

times they were forth tellers as they proclaimed the word of God. In other words a prophet was the mouthpiece of God he was a vehicle for God's direct revelation.

In this sense of the word there are no prophets today and we do not need prophets today because God has spoken, he has said all he is going to say and it is written down for us in the bible so that we know today all that God has said and is going to say. We can call the bible God's completed word. Nobody can say today God told me such and such for God did not tell him anything of the sort. The way that God speaks today is not through the word of some modern day prophet but through the revealed word of God.

Paul in this letter says that the prophets and the apostles are the foundation stones of the church (Ephesians 2:20). Their word given by God and their authority exercised in the early church is the foundation on which we build. We cannot and must not seek to change the foundation otherwise any church that seeks to do so will collapse it is our job to build on that foundation. But because there are no prophets today does not mean that it takes away from what Paul is saying, his point is that the risen Lord grants differing gifts to different people.

In Ephesus they needed the gift of the Apostles and until the completion of the Scriptures they needed prophets both gifts come from the risen Lord.

**c) Evangelists** – An Evangelist was someone who proclaimed the 'evangel' that is the good news. The noun only appears three times in the New Testament in Acts 21:8 where it refers to Philip and 2 Timothy 4:5 where it refers to Timothy and here. The verb 'to evangelise' is used many times to describe the spreading of the gospel.

Since all Christians are under an obligation to bear witness of Christ to evangelise then the gift of an Evangelist, which is granted to some, is obviously different from everyday witnessing of Christ. In the New Testament it certainly referred to those who proclaimed the Gospel but I think their function was twofold. As soon as the local church was founded false teachers came and tried to infiltrate them with their false teaching. New Christians could easily be taken in by those who sounded Christian but are not so Evangelists were needed to keep on defining the true gospel in the face of false teachers who wanted to destroy it. Timothy was an Evangelist and he was sent by Paul to ward off the false teachers in Ephesus.

So Evangelist were gospel tellers in order to keep the church on the right track but they were also gospel tellers to those who did not know it and in that sense they were Evangelist as we use that word today.

An Evangelist is someone with the gift to make the gospel plain and relevant to unbelievers. The church needs this gift today probably more than ever; we ought to pray for God to raise up Evangelists men with the gift of making plain the gospel to unbelievers. But the gift of an Evangelist is not an excuse for Christians not to evangelise or not to do the work of evangelism. You do not need the gift of an Evangelist to do the work of evangelism.

But once again we must not miss Paul's point, which is look at the variety of gifts within the church. All gifts are needed; all must be used for the church to function properly.

**d) Pastors and Teachers** – Now for many years this role of Pastor Teacher was separated as two separate functions within the church but it must be said that it is generally accepted that this is one role or one gift within the church. The church needs Pastor Teachers, they were needed in the early church and they are needed today. The word 'Pastor' means shepherd and so Christ grants men gifts to be undershepherds of his sheep.

A Shepherd's responsibility is to look after his sheep, this involves protecting them from harm, it means leading them and it involves feeding them. Well in the spiritual realm this is the Pastor's function in the church.

But it's not just the Pastor's task for all elder's are undershepherds so it is the task of the eldership to do these things, they are gifted by God but within the Eldership there might be one man set apart full time to shepherd and to teach the people.

Every Pastor must look after God's sheep, this obviously involves encouraging them, caring for them gently and helping them in practical ways but it also includes protecting them from false teaching and from false living and guiding and leading the sheep into godly living.

Much of the Pastor's shepherding will be done through his preaching and teaching ministry. Thus this gift of Pastor Teacher is one function within the church. No pastor will ever be good at shepherding his sheep unless he preaches and teaches the word of God. If we are going to be good sheep and make the life of the Pastor easier we need to be people who listen and obey the preaching and teaching that comes from the leadership of this church.

The only way that you will really be cared for is not having someone put their arm around you in comforting you although there might be a time when that is needed but you will know real care if you listen and heed God's word and put it into practise whether that is from the pulpit or in private instruction.

Finally my time has gone and I want to take this point up again next time but I want to notice that Pastors and Teachers are not sent and gifted so that God's people might remain passive in the church and allow the Elders to get on with it. No verse 12 tells us that the function of the Pastor Teacher is to equip Christians for work of service, so that the body of Christ will be built up.

As the Eldership of any church preaches God's word then the congregation ought to realise from the preaching that they too have a task to perform, that they too have been granted gifts from the risen Christ. Every believer has been granted a gift or gifts from the risen Christ. Now those gifts are not to sit idle but they are to be used for the service of others, so that as everyone functions as they ought to function using their gifts in service to God and to others then the whole body of Christ is built up and edified.

Now because we all have different gifts and we all have different functions within the life of the church therefore we must not be jealous of others because they are doing something in the church that you want to do. They are exercising their gift are you exercising yours. In the same way we must not think too highly of ourselves so that we think the church could not function without us, we must not think that we are more important than anyone else, or that our gift is better than the gifts of others.

It is true that some of our gifts are more prominent, for example the Pastor Teacher is more of an upfront man because those are his gifts, but that doesn't make my gifts more important than the person who behind the scenes is using their gifts for God. My gifts help to equip you so that you use your gifts effectively for God and when we are all using our gifts then the body of Christ is served and is edified.

The Elders of this church equip you by expounding God's word to you and as we do and as we listen to God's word as a congregation, we will find our hearts being stirred to do this or that for the cause of Christ depending on the gifts granted to us.

As we then exercise those gifts our church will be blessed through your gifts our unity will be enhanced and the diversity of our membership will become more and more evident and that will lead to glory being brought to our God.

Amen