

Ephesians 4:7-13

When you think of unity what comes to your mind

Some think of a large organizational structure and all submissive to it

Others think of unity as conformity – we all look alike act alike think alike

The year the walls came down in Russia I was at a seminar

The head of this Christian organization

Had just received permission to send missionaries over

He gave his vision of this group – an army of young men and women

All the men having well trimmed short hair – white shirts - blue pants

The girls all having long hair – white blouses - blue skirts

I think that was his idea of unity

We are in a section where Paul is stressing the unity of the church

And he does not mean that Christians are to be a boring replica of each other

When the Bible speaks of unity it means something quite different

In verses 4-6 Paul writes

**There is one body – one Spirit – one hope – one Lord – one faith – one baptism –
One God and Father of all - who is over all - through all - and in all**

You see Christian unity is not based upon our likeness

Just look around - we are not much alike at all

Christians are an incredibly diverse group of individuals

Diverse in physical appearance diverse in personality and experience

Chosen out of the world for God's unique purposes

And you cannot tell by outward appearance who is in the body and who is not

We differ - we have different tastes in music food clothing

Outwardly we certainly have more things different about us than the same

But yet we are one – we are one family – we are the body of Christ

We are the temple of the Holy Spirit

We all are children of the King – we have one faith

Christian unity is based upon experience and identity

I'm sure I mentioned this before

Every Spring Moody Bible Institute has a one day men's conference

I attended this conference with hundreds of other believers

The attendees were literally a cross section of Chicago life

Blacks Hispanics Chinese – every nationality and every strata of society

And as I was observing all these men it occurred to me

Every one of us had been chosen by God before the world began

Called redeemed justified and placed in the body of Christ

Every one of them was my brother

At that time

I actually had more in common with them then I did with much of my family

We were all part of the same forever family

One of the phrases the Bible uses of us

Is that we are a peculiar people – obviously some more peculiar than others

What it means is that we are unique

We are a peculiar people whom God has called to Himself for His purposes – we are a unique group different than any other in the world

And you cannot tell from the outside who is in and who is not

100% or our likeness is on the inside

I bring this up because

Due to our incredible outward diversity we need to work towards unity

It will not come naturally to us

Now all that I have said is leading to this

Immediately after stressing our unity

Paul makes a left turn and begins to stress our diversity in the area of gifts

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it

He gave some to be apostles – some to be prophets – some to be evangelists

Some to be pastors and teachers

We are all members of the same body

But some have received one gift and some another

1Cor says – There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. There are

different kinds of service but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working but the same God works all of them in all men

After mentioning the different gifts Paul adds

All of these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one (now listen) just as He determines.

In Romans Paul simply puts it this way – We have different gifts according to the grace given us

Amazingly these texts give us the model for church unity

Which is not that of a well oiled organization

The church is a body containing diverse but essential contributing parts

Working for the same goal in the same power

Without the things we have in common – faith the Holy Spirit the Lord our heavenly Father

There is no church

Those calling themselves churches who meet and don't have these things

They are not a church at all – they are a tax exempt social club

The things we have in common are essential to our unity

But the uniqueness in which God has gifted us is essential to our mission

Without a diversity of gifts

The church is not healthy and cannot function properly

Any more than a body can function properly without all its organs

Today's passage breaks down this way

The Gift of Christ to Individual Believers

How Christ Won the Right to Give Gifts

The Gifts of Christ to the Whole Church

The Gift of Christ to Individual Believers

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift

Don't you love contrast

This could easily read – we are all one, but on the other hand, to each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gifts

Paul moves from unity to individualism

Paul is stressing that **unity is not uniformity**

We are all united but we are not all alike

Grace is one of the great words of the English language

Undeserved favor – goodness given to those who don't merit it

Grace is a single word definition of the Gospel

And God is a God of grace because He freely gives

Giving is part of His nature – He loves – He gives – He forgives

God is gracious because of who He is not because of who we are

Or anything we have done

There is a Christian song with this refrain

Not because of who I am, but because of what you've done; not because of what I've done, but because of who you are

That's right on - that's it - Grace depends entirely upon the One who gives it

Not on those who receive it

Grace is God's self-activated, self-generated, sovereign act of giving

God's grace gives more than gifts to men

God grace gives more than blessings to men

God's greatest gift of grace is Himself

Infinitely more important and precious than any blessing God gives us

Is the gift of Himself

The incomprehensible and staggering truth of the gospel

Is that Holy God has given Himself to sinful mankind

God's grace gives us salvation and power and peace and holiness wisdom

A throne a kingdom an inheritance

And every other blessing there is in the heavenly places

But far more important than any of those blessings

God blesses us with His personal presence

God owes us nothing except judgment

He doesn't owe us even the smallest blessing or favor

Yet He has given us the immeasurable blessing of an intimate shared life

He has given us all that He has and all that He is – that is love – that is grace

I came to this point and thought – isn't that enough message for today

Holy God loves sinful men so much

That He withholds no good thing from us including Himself

That is the pinnacle

That is truth you can live on – truth you can put in the bank

Truth to hold you for a while

When I decided to pick a partner to spend the rest of my life with

I wanted someone I could give myself to

This person was to be the one above all others

I wanted someone with good character a desire to give herself to me

I needed to make a wise choice

But when I consider who I am knowing that God wants to spend eternity with me – I don't get it

I don't understand His choice – He could have done better – a lot better

But for most of you I could say the same thing

You see when He chose us before the foundation of the world

God chose us out of pure grace – not merit

It's just like the hymnist said

Just as I am without one plea, save that Thy blood was shed for me

And that Thou bidst me come to Thee – O Lamb of God I come I come

Now the grace in which we stand not only saves us it enables us

And that is how the term is used in this passage

Paul is not talking here about the gifts of the Spirit – that is charismata

This is charis - special grace given by Jesus – the grace of Christ

And it works in and through the life of every believer

And Jesus gives this gift as He wills

First the measure of enabling grace is given us in proportion to our faith

More faith – more grace

In effect faith actuates grace

Then enabling grace is given in proportion to God's design for our lives

The greater the works God has for you to do

The greater the grace you will need to accomplish them

Then the greater the grace you will receive

The awesome thing is – God never runs out of grace

He is not a depository of grace - He is not a bank

You can keep withdrawing from Him until He runs out – God is grace

And you will never get to the point where His grace will stop flowing

First there is the gift of Christ to individuals

Now let's consider How Christ Won the Right to Give Gifts

The phrase – when He ascended on high – pictures a triumphant Christ

It pictures His return from battlefield earth back to the glory of heaven

Bringing with Him the trophies of His victory

In His life, crucifixion, death and resurrection

Jesus conquered sin Satan and death

And returned to the glory He had with the Father

But sin death and Satan are not the captives

There are several theories regarding who these captives are

And from where He got them

So I will give you what I believe

Salvation has always been the same way, faith in the finished work of Christ

Before Christ men were saved by looking forward to the Messiah

When they died their sins had not yet been atoned for

The price had not yet been paid

They could not stand in the presence of a holy God

They went to paradise – which I believe to be the second heaven

The first heaven is the universe – the sun stars and planets

The second heaven is paradise

The third heaven is the throne room of God

Jesus told the thief on the cross – today you will be with me in paradise

The beggar Lazarus looked down from paradise to see the rich man

Whose arms was he in – not God's – not the Son of God's – Abraham's

**When Christ died on the cross He emptied paradise
And brought those in it home with Him to the Father**

Where they now live eternally

Some might get a little upset by the term captives

But remember Paul called himself a prisoner of the Lord

He also is a captive

Like Paul these are prisoners of the Lord – His slaves – the redeemed

Brought triumphantly into heaven and presented to the Father as trophies

And frankly they couldn't be happier about it

Paul's point here is to explain that Jesus paid the infinite price for victory

He died the death of the righteous for the unrighteous

Jesus is the Lamb of God whose death atoned for the sins of the world

He lowered Himself to come down and die

That qualified Him to be exalted above the heavens

He is Sovereign Lord

He now has authority to do what He pleases

And what He pleases to do is always good and right and true

Jesus fills the entire universe with blessing most particularly His church

And He does it to bring glory to the Father

And to present to Him captive after captive

Are you a prisoner of the Lord – are you a captive

First we have the gift of Christ to individual believers – namely grace

Then how Christ won the right to give gifts – His death in our place

Now let's look at the Gifts of Christ to the Whole Church

Christ not only gave gifts to individuals but He gave them to the whole body

To each of us He gave the gift of grace

Grace for salvation – grace for enablement

Then to the His body the church

Christ gave especially gifted men to help the body

Namely - apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers

He is the head over all things to the church – He is the authority the ruler

So Christ supplies the church with all that it needs

In 1Cor 12 Paul says -**God has appointed to the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers**

That order is not accidental – first came apostles then prophets

Apostles and prophets were given three basic responsibilities

They laid the foundation of the church

They received and declared the revelation of God's Word

They confirmed that word through miracles signs and wonders

The apostles and prophets laid the basic foundation of the church

They revealed God's Word

Their work was authenticated by miracles signs and wonders

The word apostle means “sent one” or “one sent on a mission”

In its primary and most technical sense

Apostle is used of the 12 including Matthias who replaced Judas

The qualifications were simple

Apostles were to have witnessed the resurrected Christ and been chosen by Christ

The list of 12 expanded to include among others Paul James and Jude

James and Jude being the half brothers of Jesus

There may have been more whose names we don't know

But they all had these two things in common

They were witnesses of Christ and were chosen by Christ

There is a movement in the church today to call some men apostles

And if they are using the Greek term meaning “sent one”

As a theological hierarchy – kind of like bishop or elder

I have no problem with that – although I think it is confusing

We are all sent by God – we are all ambassadors of Christ

But if they use the title to mean

They have the power and authority of the original group

It just isn't so

The apostles did the work God prepared beforehand for them to walk in and have

not been replaced

Jesus also gave the church the office of prophets

It seems apostles were also given the gift of prophecy

For instance the church at Antioch referred to Paul as a prophet

But quite obviously there were prophets who were not apostles

Prophets always spoke for God but did not always give a newly revealed message from God

The message of the prophets was to be judged by that of the apostles

Generally speaking the apostolic message was more general

The prophetic word more specific

Now there is a disagreement about whether there are prophets or not

While I do not believe there can ever again be apostles

I do believe that God distributes gifts to men and women as He pleases

And I am not about to tell Jesus what gifts are not allowed

What did we just read – He gave gifts to men – He still gives gifts to men

But those who claim to have the gift of prophecy

Are to be judged by the outcome of their words

To sum it up

Apostles and prophets were sent to lay the foundation of the church

And give us the God's Word in written form

Apostles were first – then came prophets

Finally Christ sent us evangelists pastors and teachers

These are gifted men and women whom God has given

To maintain and grow the church the apostles and prophets began

There is no controversy here

They were sent to the original church

They continue on to this day

The Greek word translated pastor is the word normally used for shepherd

It emphasizes the care protection and leadership of the position

Teaching is the primary function of pastors

I asked a pastor whom I admired what he considered to be his primary work
Without hesitation he answered – “Prayer and study”

Needless to say – that has influenced me

There are two schools of thought here

The one I adhere to is that the office of pastor includes teaching

But that does not mean that all teachers are pastors

There are gifted Bible teachers who never stand in a pulpit

Might fill in once in a while – might not

I also believe that Christ gifts His church with teachers for all age groups

When most of us think of evangelists

We kind of envision Billy Graham or Luis Palau

Large stadium events 50,000 people hearing the message

Thousands coming to Christ

But evangelists like these are the exceptions – rare exceptions

There are literally thousands of practicing evangelists

And most travel the country with little or no support

Living in near poverty

Their income derived mainly from offerings taken at churches

Their ministry is small and mostly unrecognized - except by God

The term we use for them is itinerant evangelists

They are called to the task – equipped for the task

And they are walking in the work which God prepared for them to do

Doing their part in the building up of the body of Christ

Regardless of the personal cost

Every one of these men and women have been given to the church by Jesus

For the building up of the church until we all reach unity and maturity

Unity through diversity is a very unique concept

If men ran the church they would try to build unity

By making us as alike as they could – kind of like the army

Only God would take a diverse group of people

United only by faith and the Holy Spirit

And unify them by making them more diverse

By gifting us differently God has made us each invaluable to the other

The gift of people and the gifts of the Spirit are given for the same purpose

The gifts are to be used to serve God's people

So that the body of Christ might become increasingly more unified in faith

And mature in practice

Gifts are to be used to prepare God's people for works of service

To bring us to a higher level of knowledge and maturity

So that each of us might complete our mission

That is why they are given

If a Christian is using his gift to glorify himself instead of Christ

If he is using his gifts to build his own little kingdom instead of God's

If he is using his gifts to make a living in secular society

Instead of ministering to the body

He is betraying the Lord

You see Jesus has given men and women these gifts

For the ultimate purpose of glorifying God

We have been saved to help each other bring others into the kingdom

And do it all to the glory of God