



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for 2, November 2008
Released on Wednesday, October 29, 2008**

"Using Your Gifts"

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Corinthians 12:4–20. Matthew 28:16-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 1 Corinthians 12:3–21; Ephesians 4:1–16.

LESSON TEXT: Ephesians 4:1–16.

- 1** I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
- 2** With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love;
- 3** Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- 4** There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
- 5** One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- 6** One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.
- 7** But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
- 8** Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.
- 9** (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?
- 10** He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)
- 11** And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;
- 12** For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:
- 13** Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:
- 14** That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;
- 15** But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:
- 16** From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to study the walk of Christians, imparted gifts and gifted leaders, and edification (building up) of the whole body of Christ.

Principle: to realize that the love of believers for God and for one another brings church harmony.

Application: to help believers strive for Spirit-led maturity.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon form a group of Paul's letters known as *the Prison Epistles*. These letters are so called because each mentions Paul's being held prisoner or in chains (example: Ephesians 3:1; 4:1). We believe that Paul wrote these letters while awaiting his trial in Rome during the period AD 61–63.

All are quite useful for the church today, since Paul takes up issues of a timeless nature. Times have changed, but people haven't, so we are able to find much in these letters that feels like they have been written precisely for the benefit of the twenty-first-century church.

As with many of Paul's letters, Ephesians follows the format of opening with a presentation of doctrinal teaching, followed by application of that teaching in the life of the individual and the church. In Ephesians, this shift takes place at the beginning of chapter 4.

In the first three chapters of this letter, Paul discusses the church's foundation in the plan of God (Ephesians 1:11, 12); Paul explains Christ's role in breaking down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14); and he calls his readers to recognize that Christ is the head of His church, and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). These points are all at odds with a divided church. Therefore, chapter 4 begins Paul's expression of the vital, unitary nature of the church.

SPIRITUAL UNITY- Ephesians 4:1-6

1. Why did Paul call himself "the prisoner of the Lord" (Ephesians 4:1)?

In spite of the fact that Paul was confined by government authorities, he did not consider himself a prisoner of Rome. As Paul saw it, he was "the prisoner of the Lord" (Eph. 4:1). First, his heart had been captured by the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, he had been "apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12) and then sent out to apprehend others. Second, he was imprisoned for the cause of Christ, not because he was a criminal (cf. 1 Pet. 4:15-16).

Being a man who practiced what he preached, Paul was in a position to urge others to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). While we often think of vocation as an occupation or a profession, "vocation" here refers to our Christian calling.

To be called is to be invited to an event or task. As Christians we have been invited to live our lives according to the standards of God, and we have accepted this invitation with all our hearts.

We may have many jobs and various careers over a lifetime, but Christians have a single vocation: to live with and for Christ (see Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:6). This life *walk* extends to work, play, family, school, and entertainment—to whatever we do. We do not walk in a *worthy* manner when we dishonor the name of Christ and betray the trust He has put in us. When we walk/live for ourselves alone, we do so as enemies of Christ (see Philippians 3:18).

2. Where does Christian unity come from? How can we encourage such unity (vs. 2,3)?

Since Christian growth and character are not immediate consequences of coming to know the Lord, the New Testament contains many exhortations to develop the traits that identify us as God's people. The qualities mentioned here are akin to the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) and the virtues believers are enjoined to add to their faith (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

"Lowliness" (Eph. 4:2) is humility. Since pride can lead to destruction (Prov. 16:18), it behooves all Christians to strive to be humble. Perhaps the best example is Christ washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17).

"Meekness" (Eph. 4:2) is not weakness, although this is a common misunderstanding, since it is the opposite of a blustery, arrogant show of force. True meekness comes from the inner strength of character that enables a person to treat others with gentleness, respect, and consideration. "Longsuffering" is being patient. Both difficult people and difficult circumstances require long-suffering. Maintaining healthy human relationships, whether in a family or in church, requires long-suffering.

Forbearance is the quality of putting up with someone or some situation. Both the motivation and the method for forbearance should be love, the crowning virtue of God's people (John 13:34-35).

While "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) is not something we achieve through human effort, it is maintained through qualities inspired by God's Spirit. This unity is held together by "the bond of peace." Peace is not only what we receive through faith in Christ (Rom. 5:1) but also helps us remain united in Christ (Col. 3:14-15).

3. What did Paul mean by "one body" (vs. 4-6)?

Paul often uses the metaphor of a human *body* to represent the church (see 1 Corinthians 12:27). Elsewhere Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). The logical answer to this question is "no, certainly not." There was and is only one Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul begins his famous list of "seven ones" by reminding his readers that there is but *one body*, the body of Christ, the church. In Ephesians, this is especially the united church of Jewish and Gentile believers (see 2:14-16).

One body is thus appropriate to be first in a list that Paul chooses to illustrate church unity. In all of this, Paul is showing the folly of a divided church. From God's perspective, the church is one whether we like it or not!

A further example of this is that the church is given *one Spirit*, the Holy Spirit of God. There are not various Holy Spirits for the different denominations of the church. There is only one. Also, the church is motivated by *one hope*, its call to eternal salvation through Jesus Christ.

One Lord in this context is Jesus, the one we serve as the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22). Logically, then, there is only *one faith*, because Paul is speaking of faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 4:13). There is only one faith because there is only one Son of God, the Lord Jesus.

Further, there is only *one baptism*: baptism into Christ. According to Paul, "as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). There can be only one baptism because there is only one Christ. With this understanding, Paul ties baptism to full identification with Christ.

That there is only *one God* is the cornerstone of Jewish faith (Deuteronomy 6:4). This has not changed with the advent of Jesus as the Son of God. Christians believe there is only one God. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not a denial of the oneness of God.

Paul uses marvelous imagery to describe the complete oneness of God. God is the *Father of all*, the source and creator of all things. There exists nothing made by a rival god, because there is no rival creator. Paul then uses three prepositional phrases to describe God's presence everywhere: *above all*, *through all*, and *in you*

all. This is not a statement that "everything is God." Rather, it summarizes Paul's belief that God is universally present and influential in everything we do.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS- Ephesians 4:7-13

4. When did Christ give spiritual gifts to the church (vs. 7-10)?

Having urged his readers to understand God's intention that they walk in unity of purpose, Paul now proceeds to show how unity is a key to the functioning of the church. The first point of unity that Paul mentions is that each member of the church has been *given grace*. The underlying idea is "gift," something not earned. This gracious gift is bestowed upon each believer in accordance with Christ's *measure*, meaning the Lord determines the specifics of this gift.

What is the gracious gift being talked about? Certainly we understand salvation is a gift that cannot be earned (see Ephesians 2:8), but that does not seem to be what Paul is talking about here. He is referring to gifts that will lead to the success and unity of the church. This is explained more clearly in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. The point is that Christ provides His church with gifted people to do the necessary ministries; this should lead to the unity of the body.

Paul illustrates his point by using powerful imagery drawn from Psalm 68. In this psalm we get the picture of the conquering king returning to his city. Yet Jesus is not returning from the killing fields, but has risen from the grave. Jesus has not vanquished a foreign army, but death itself. Moreover, Jesus does not receive tribute *gifts* from others; rather, He gives gifts to them.

Finally, Jesus does not sit on an earthly throne, but reigns from Heaven so that *He might fill all things*. Nothing is beyond the reach of His power.

5. What spiritual gifts do you have, and how can they be used to develop unity within your particular church?

God gives gifts to each person in His body, the church, for the benefit of all (1 Peter 4:10). When each person uses his or her spiritual gift or gifts, the load of ministry is shared. This relieves any one person or a few people from being burdened with the heavy load of the work of the church. For unity to happen, the church must function as a body (1 Corinthians 12).

This practice of mutual ministry within the church not only benefits the church as a whole, but each person as well. As you use your particular gift, you are becoming more of what God desires you to be. Teachers help students as they teach, and students help the teacher to experience the grace of God as they follow the teaching received. Each grows as he or she encourages another in the Christian walk.

6. Why were leadership gifts given to God's people (vs. 11-13)?

We should remember that the theme of this section is the God-ordained unity of the church. If we keep this in mind, we can see that the emphasis here is not upon giving special endowments to individuals, but more upon providing certain categories of leaders for the work of the church as a whole. Christ providentially supplies *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers* for the ongoing ministry of His body, the church.

As a part of the church's foundation (Eph. 2:20), "apostles" and "prophets" (4:11) had a key role in those days prior to the writing of the New Testament Scriptures.

The apostles were special emissaries of Christ, selected from among His many disciples (Luke 6:13). After the defection of Judas, Matthias was chosen as his successor (Acts 1:16-26). Later, Paul was chosen as the "apostle of the Gentiles" (Rom. 11:13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:8-10; Gal. 1:1, 11-12). Credentials of apostles included the ability to perform miracles (Matt. 10:8; 2 Cor. 12:12) and having seen the risen Lord (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Prophets were inspired preachers who received revelations from God as did the Hebrew prophets. While little is mentioned about these New Testament prophets, we know that they could foretell the future (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11). There were also female prophets (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5).

Evangelists were preachers of the gospel, equivalent to itinerant ministers, missionaries, or church planters today. Philip was called an evangelist (Acts 21:8), and Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

The Greek grammar of Ephesians 4:11 seems to indicate that "pastors and teachers" referred to one office or function. These were local church leaders who were to shepherd God's flock (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Again, the purpose of these gifts being bestowed upon the church was not an end in itself, however (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26). Rather, they were to help God's people discover how they could use their own gifts "for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), having been equipped to do so by their spiritual leaders. Ultimately, this was to encourage "the unity of the faith" (v. 13) and bring about spiritual maturity among the people of God.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH- Ephesians 4:14-16

7. Why is it important that we grow from "children" to a mature unified body (v. 14)?

The goal of unity within the body of Christ will not be achieved accidentally. Paul now gives some concrete application of ways to break out of the cycle of church disunity.

Paul's plea is, "Grow up! Stop being spiritual babies!" (See 1 Corinthians 14:20.) In the fable of Jack and the Beanstalk, the gullible Jack traded away the family cow for "magic" beans. That story turned out well, but most stories of gullibility don't. As in Paul's day, there are still those who foist false *doctrine* upon the church. A mature, unified body is much more likely to resist such foolishness. Doctrine is not like the *wind*, sometimes strong, often gusty, ever shifting. Doctrine and faith need to be stable and reliable.

8. What do we do if someone is spreading false teaching? Does our desire for unity mean that we just put up with it and keep quiet (v. 15A)?

Paul points out that this attitude is what keeps the church in the infantile stage. If the body of Christ is to *grow up*, false teaching must be confronted and refuted (see Titus 1:9). This must not be done as a personal attack, but at the level of *truth*.

Truth is from God and will withstand any human attack. The person with truth on his or her side need not fear being exposed as devious. Christians are to love truth (compare 2 Thessalonians 2:10) and to take joy in truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). Yet we make sure we speak the truth in love.

9. What is our goal as Christians (vs. 15b, 16)?

Our goal is to be like the Head of the body, Christ. Just as a healthy physical body operates effectively, efficiently, and harmoniously, so too should the body of Christ as we listen to our Head. The result is a unified and an edified church.

CONCLUSION

The Unity of the Church

This may be a discouraging lesson for some who serve a church that is wracked with strife or for those who have been victims of church warfare in the past. The key to overcoming this problem is "speaking the truth in love." Many cantankerous church people are ready and willing to speak their understanding of the truth, not

allowing for differences of opinion on relatively unimportant matters. They have the "truth" part, but not the "love" part.

On the other hand, there are those who want to avoid conflict at all cost and just love everyone 24/7. For them, "love" means never correcting a misguided or misinformed brother or sister.

Would you rather be in a church that has truth but no love or a church having love but no regard for truth? We shouldn't have to make this choice. Unity comes through good teaching of correct doctrine, done without arrogance or disrespect. Unity comes when the love of Christ is shared and practiced by every member.

PRAYER

O God, the one who is over all, through all, and in all things, we pray today that You would make our hearts long for unity and peace between all who believe in our Lord Jesus. It is in His name we pray, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Work and pray for church unity.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON:

Next week's lesson is "**Confronting Opposition.**" In Galatians 2:11-21 we find Paul confronting Peter for showing partiality toward Judaizers who came from Jerusalem to Antioch and for shying away from Gentile believers. Focus on how Paul defended (here and in Ephesians 2:8-9) the great truth of justification by faith alone and not by works of the law.

Lesson Summarized by:

Willie Ferrell
Jesus Is All Ministries
www.jesusisall.com

WORKS CITED

Summary and commentary derived from Standard Lesson Commentary Copyright© 2008 by permission of Standard Publishing.

Reprinted by permission of The Incorporated Trustees of the Gospel Worker Society, Union Gospel Press, P.O. Box 6059, Cleveland, Ohio 44101. (Web site: <http://www.uniongospelpress.com/>)

The Pulpit Commentary, Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Hrsg.), Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc.

The KJV Parallel Bible Commentary, by Nelson Books.