

## **“Unity in Variety”**

July 21, 2024

Ephesians 4:7-16

### **I. Introduction**

Just before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed in **John 17:20-21**, “My prayer is not for them alone, i.e., the Disciples. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Unity of Christians was and is important. As members of one family, Christians must be able to live together; care for and support each other. Jesus said that unity of Christians would also be a testimony to the world about who He is.

As we saw last week in the first 6 verses of Ephesians 4, Paul wrote about the essentials which lead to unity: *humility, gentleness, patience, accepting each other in love, working hard to keep unity, and peace.* . Paul also listed 7 sources of Christian unity. There is 1 Body, 1 Spirit, 1 hope, 1 Lord, 1 faith, 1 baptism and 1 God and Father of all. Since we have so much in common, if we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, there will be unity in the family of God.

However, unity is not uniformity. Uniformity results from pressure from outside—the world tries to force all of us to think and act like everyone else. On the other hand, unity comes from within and is a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. “Unity” doesn’t mean that individuality or individual responsibility is lost. Within unity—the family of God—there is variety or diversity. For that reason, Paul moved from what all Christians have in common to how Christians vary from each other. Paul continued his call for unity by discussing the variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. There can be unity in variety.

### **II. The Gifts within Unity**

**A. The Gifts of Christ to Individual Believers** Verse 7 begins with the word “but” which could be translated as “*on the other hand*” there is variety in unity. **1 Corinthians 12:4** says, “There are different kind of gifts but the same Spirit.” Later, **verse 7** added, “Now to each one the manifestation (or sign) of the Spirit is given for the common good.” The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers for the purpose of building up the

body of believers; for the common good. No gift is given to be used selfishly or for personal profit. A gift is given to every Christian to benefit and bless the church. Putting it a different way: *“a spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified, and believers are built up—edified.”* If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, you have a gift that is perfectly suited to you. Each Christian has been given a specific gift through which he or she can minister in Christ’s name. Peter wrote in

1 Peter 4:10, “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” In Romans 12 Paul also wrote about unity, variety, and gifts—turn to Romans 12:4-8.

A person doesn’t “earn” a gift; gifts are something a person receives. Christians receive spiritual gifts through the working of God’s grace. A believer’s gifts are not determined by the believer’s preferences, merits, or any other personal consideration, but solely by God’s sovereign and gracious will. Christians are gifted according to God’s plan, God’s purpose, and God’s distribution. Individual Christians have no more to do with determining their gift than they did with determining what color of skin, hair, or eyes with which they were born. Just like human characteristics, believers’ gifts are like snowflakes or fingerprints—each one is completely distinct from all others. God is the sole giver and determiner of spiritual gifts. Gifts are given according to God’s will.

Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools with which to build. Christians are not to live in isolation—they are members of the same body. No Christian can replace another in God’s plan. God has His own individualized plan for each Christian and has individually gifted each one accordingly. We are not interchangeable parts in Christ’s Body but as Romans 12:5 said, “In Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” When a believer doesn’t use his or her gift correctly, God’s work suffers. Just like every member on a basketball team has a particular skill, position, and responsibility which they must carry out for the team to be successful; every believer is on God’s team and is important to God’s plan with his unique skills, position, and responsibility which he or she must carry out so that God’s team will be successful.

Paraphrasing [Psalm 68:18](#), Paul emphasized in [Eph. 4:8](#) that Christ is the Giver of gifts through the Holy Spirit. Paul reminded his readers that after Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven as Victor forevermore. In Paul's day, following a huge victory, a military conqueror would often lead into the city those whom he had freed from captivity and share the spoils with his followers. And that is just what Jesus did. As Victor over Satan, sin, and death ([Colossians 2:15](#)), Jesus led into heaven those who were freed from captivity to Satan and death and then Jesus gave gifts to men—gifts to carry on His work.

In [1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-31](#) and [Romans 12:3-8](#) and here in [Ephesians 4:11](#) there are lists of spiritual gifts. They are not identical. This means that Paul didn't name all the gifts that are available to individual believers. It is up to each individual to determine what his or her gift from Christ is and then to use it for the good of others.

## **B. The Gifts of Christ to the Whole Church**

**1. Apostles** After writing about the gifts to individuals, Paul then went on to discuss some of the gifts of Christ to the whole church, i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. What Paul was saying is that Christ takes certain people who have been given particular gifts and He gives them to the church. [1 Corinthians 12:28](#) says, “God appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers.”

The word *apostle* means “one who is sent with a commission.” In the majority of cases in the New Testament, an apostle was a man with special credentials; he had to have seen the resurrected Christ and had also been directly and personally commissioned by Jesus to be Jesus' representative; [turn to Acts 1:21-22](#). Jesus chose 12 Apostles and later He chose Paul to be the 13<sup>th</sup> apostle ([1 Corinthians 15:7-9](#)). With this particular definition of an apostle, it is obvious that they no longer exist. Before their deaths, these men helped lay the foundation of the church—[Eph. 2:20](#) says, the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” Once the foundation was laid, the Apostles were no longer needed.

**2. Prophets** Then there are the prophets. [Ephesians 3:5-6](#) says that a New Testament prophet was one who proclaims the Word of God. Believers in the early New Testament churches did not possess Bibles—the New Testament wasn't even written let alone compiled yet. Instead, the Holy Spirit would share

God's truth with those possessing the gift of prophesy. According to [1 Corinthians 14:3](#), "Everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort." Like the Apostles, the office of prophet ceased with the completion of the New Testament, just as the Old Testament prophets disappeared when the Old Testament was completed some 400 years before Christ. Once the foundation of the church was laid, the work of the apostles and prophets was finished.

**3. Evangelists** The third gift to the whole church is evangelists. Some evangelists were men who traveled from place to place preaching the Gospel and winning the lost—in [Acts 21:8](#) Philip is called an evangelist. In [2 Timothy 4:5](#), Timothy is told to do "the work of an evangelist" as he ministered in Ephesus. The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church, the evangelists built on it by winning the lost to Christ. The office of evangelist is still with us. Every believer should be a witness for Jesus Christ, but there are people who have the gift of evangelism—the ability to turn any conversation to God and His love. For those looking for a loophole about evangelism, let me put it a different way: the fact that a believer may not possess the gift of evangelism doesn't excuse him or her from being burdened for lost souls or from witnessing to them—the Great Commission was given to all Christians.

**4. Finally, there are Pastors and Teachers.** "He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers," ([Ephesians 4:11](#)). The fact that the word "some" is not repeated before "teachers" would seem to indicate that "pastors – teachers" is one office with two ministries. "Pastor" means "*shepherd*," indicating that the local church is like a flock of sheep ([Acts 20:28](#)). Just like a shepherd, it is the pastor's responsibility to feed and lead God's flock. He does this by means of teaching the Word of God, the food that nourishes the sheep. The Word is also the rod and staff that guides and disciplines the sheep. The Word of God is the church's protection and provisions—nothing else can replace it, so it must be taught. For this reason, all Christians must be people of the Book.

### III. Indicators of Spiritual Growth

Under the guidance of evangelists and, especially, pastor-teachers, all believers are to be trained in the Word of God. Under the ministry of the pastor-teacher, the church grows in unity as it follows the

teachings from God's Word. Through the Word of God, each member is equipped to do the job of ministering through serving and building up the body. Turn to 2 Timothy 3:14-17. The members of the church grow by feeding on God's Word and ministering to each other. Paul listed several indicators of spiritual growth; of becoming a more mature Christian—becoming more Christ-like.

**A. Stability** First, they have stability. The maturing Christian is not tossed about by every “*new*” or “*modern*” religious fad that comes along. He knows what God's Word says and is ready to stand by it. On the other hand, the immature Christian is gullible--unstable. He doesn't recognize false doctrines; he falls for “the cunning and craftiness of men.” Today is no different than the past—just look at the churches that teach “easy believism”—a feel good religion. Instead of preaching all the Biblical truths including sin and hell and the wrath of God, they pick and choose what they want. They preach a god who loves everyone and as a god of love their false god will take everyone to heaven when they die. Turn to 2 Timothy 4:1-4.

**B. Speaking truth in love** A second evidence of maturity is “speaking the truth in love,” i.e., truth joined with love. Authentic, mature believers whose lives are marked by love will have sufficient wisdom to understand God's truth and effectively present it to others. At the same time, they have the humility and grace to present it in love and in power. Both love and truth are needed for healthy relationships. The Christian life that demonstrates the gospel with a spirit of loving sacrifice through what is done as well as what is said is a witness that cannot be ignored.

**C. Cooperation** The third evidence of maturity is cooperation. Mature Christians realize that, as members of the body of Christ as well as members of a local body, we belong to each other. We affect each other and we need each other. Each believer, no matter how insignificant he or she may appear or feel, has a ministry to other believers. The body grows as the individual members grow, and they grow as they feed on the Word and minister to each other—mature Christians are known for their cooperation with one another.

There is an emphasis on love throughout this chapter: verse 2 “Bearing with one another in love;” verse 15 “speaking the truth in love;” verse 16 “builds itself up in love.” Love is the spiritual glue that holds the body together. Love unites. It is what brings about cooperation. Love is what sets Christianity apart

from all other so-called religions. In [John 13:34-35](#) Jesus said, “**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.**”

#### **IV. Conclusion**

God doesn't give us knowledge, understanding, and gifts to keep to ourselves, but to share with others. He doesn't equip us to sit around and do nothing; He expects each Christian to serve. We are not gifted and built up in order to be complacent and self-satisfied, but we are gifted to do the Lord's work of service and to build up and expand the body of Christ even more. **We must use our gifts for God.**

If someone in the body of the local church isn't using his or her gift, the whole body will suffer. For example, suppose tomorrow morning my eyes were to decide that they didn't want to work. For a day, they wanted to sit around and do nothing. What kind of day would I have? After going about doing what things I could, how would my body feel after walking into walls, tripping over things, not getting where I needed to be? My body would suffer because of a missing “*gift*.” Not using a spiritual gift is just as devastating to the Body of Christ. If our spiritual body is going to function well, we each need to use our gifts for God.

Second, the growth of the church is not just the responsibility of the pastor or the leadership of the church. The growth of the church isn't a result of clever methods. **The growth of the church is the responsibility of every Christian.** The growth of the church is the result of every member of the Body fully using his or her spiritual gift in close contact with other believers and reaching out to non-believers. It isn't just the job of the pastor to “**Go, make disciples**” ([Matthew 28:19](#)) or to grow the church. Each individual Christian is to go into all the world.

Finally, spiritual unity is not something we manufacture. **Spiritual unity comes from Christ.** It is something we already have in Christ, and we must protect it and maintain it. Truth unites; lies divide. Love unites; selfishness divides. Therefore, “**speaking the truth in love,**” let's build each other up so that all of us may grow up to be more like Christ. Are you using your spiritual gifts? Are you a help or a hindrance to unity in the church and growth of the members of the church?