

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
II. PAUL'S CHALLENGE TO THE EPHESIANS

9.

A. WALK IN HARMONY AND DIVERSITY OF GRACE-GIFTS
EPHESIANS 4:2-16

Paul's first challenge concerning how to walk worthy of the high calling of Jesus Christ was to walk in harmony and in diversity of grace-gifts. By combining those two contrasting ideas, Paul showed that unity does not mean identity. It means to work cooperatively in a great variety of ways. People can have differing personalities, differing abilities, differing assignments, differing methods, and differing accomplishments and still not be in conflict. However, the diversity must not be of our own choosing, but of His gracious gifting. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to recognize that both spiritual harmony and productive diversity are gifts from God. He encouraged the Ephesians and all Christians to learn how to practice both. By they do, they get a foretaste of the great unity Jesus will eventually give to the whole created cosmos.

1. [Walk in harmony with each other] (4:2-6)
 - a. [The means obtaining harmony] (4:2)
 - (1) ***With all humility and meekness*** (4:2a)
 - (2) ***With patience, enduring with one another in love*** (4:2b)
 - (3) ***Straining to preserve the harmony*** (4:3)
 - (a) ***Of the Spirit*** (4: 3b)
 - (b) ***Through the bond of peace*** (4:3c)
 - b. [The sources of Christian harmony] (4:4-6)
 - (1) ***One body*** (4:4a)
 - (2) ***And one Spirit*** (4:4b)
 - (3) ***Just as you have been called to one hope of your calling*** (4:4c)
 - (4) ***One Lord*** (4:5a)
 - (5) ***One faith*** (4:5b)
 - (6) ***One baptism*** (4:5c)
 - (7) ***One God and Father of all*** (4:6)
 - (a) ***The One above all*** (4:6b)
 - (b) ***And through all*** (4:6c)
 - (c) ***And in you all*** (4:6d)

When Paul began to discuss achieving unity through combining harmony and diversity, he started with a challenge to harmony. In giving that challenge, he described the means of obtaining true harmony and the source for obtaining it.

Verses 2-3. The means of obtaining Christian harmony. Paul described three channels through which harmony can flow into a group of God's people. The first was "with all humility and meekness." The word translated "humility" means to subordinate self to lift others up, to deny one's self for the welfare of others or of the whole group, or to make oneself a servant or an instrument for the benefit of someone else or something else. It does not mean to be weak or even timid. It means to be

strong enough to make one's self useful for a cause, instead of exalting one's own pride or position. The word translated "meekness" has virtually the same meaning, except it contains the flavor of "gentleness." It means to be considerate of the feelings and positions of others in our dealings with them. Those attitudes will not always produce agreement, but they almost invariably will produce harmonious and cooperative relationships, even when some may see some issues differently..

Paul's second description of the way to obtain harmony was to act "with patience, enduring with one another in love." That definition contains three powerful words. The first is "patience." The word so translated means "persistence" or

“perseverance.” It means to patiently work through discussions and differences. It means to avoid insisting on immediate agreement, but to take time to work through to an agreeable conclusion. The second word is “enduring.” It means to keep on working to find an agreeable course of action. The word so translated is formed by a combination of μακρός (*makros*), which means “far away,” and θυμός (*thumos*), which means “passion” or “anger.” “Longsuffering” is an effort to translate that idea into English. It means to keep anger and impatience under control and to act with thoughtfulness and consideration of the concerns of others. The third word is “love.” The word so translated is the peculiarly Christian word that means to genuinely care about others more than about self with heart and feeling. Exercising patience with others without anger does not mean without feeling. Instead a person should deal with them with warm compassion and the feeling of genuine desire to please the other person or the whole group, not one’s own self. Practicing patience, endurance, and love will inevitably promote harmony.

Paul’s third description of the way to obtain harmony was “straining to preserve the harmony of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The word translated “straining” means to exert one’s self, to expend energy and effort. It means to really work at preserving harmony. Obtaining harmony does not come easily or without struggle. It requires hard work and genuine effort. The word translated “preserve” means “to watch” or “to guard.” Obtaining harmony requires diligence. One must always be on guard to see that it does not slip away. The word translated “bond” means “something that binds together.” It is the glue or the chain that keeps things from falling apart. The bond that keeps people together in harmony is peace. By “peace” Paul meant more than an absence of conflict. He meant a positive attitude of trusting others and approving of them, even if we disagree with some of things they do. That kind of spirit keeps people together even when they have differing opinions or differing solutions to a problem.

Paul called that kind of harmony “harmony of the Spirit.” The word translated “harmony” means “unanimity” or “agreement.” It does not mean

organizational unity. Even though the word has generally been translated “unity,” its meaning is communicated more accurately by translating it as “harmony.” It is a harmony “of the Spirit.” It is fostered, guided, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is also a spiritual harmony that transcends and stands apart from organizational unity or even ideological unity. It is a harmony that overshadows differences and disagreements. It is a harmony that no amount of abuse or misfortune can break. It is the kind of harmony that Jesus had when he prayed for his enemies, ***“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do”*** (Luke 23:34 KJV).

Paul expressed divinely inspired wisdom when he told how to obtain harmony. Christians need to study his words again and again and practice them diligently. Doing so almost always will eliminate the ugly disagreements and broken fellowships that have marred Christianity through the years.

Verses 4-6. The sources of harmony. Paul went on to describe where harmony comes from, that is, the resources that give believers the ability to practice the means that produce harmony. In so doing, he described the basic elements that Christians hold in common. Those elements are more significant than any possible separating factor. They should overshadow any divisive issue and enable believers to work together in harmony toward one overriding purpose. He named seven such uniting resources.

One body. The first source of harmony among believers that Paul mentioned was that all believers are parts of one body. All believers are united spiritually like a human body is united physically. Jesus is the Head who directs and coordinates the works of every member of His body, so they are all parts of one spiritual body. When believers are together, they can sense that unity, even if they are of different nationalities, ethnic groups, or races. Their sense of oneness overcomes all differences and molds them together into one spiritual enterprise all over the world. That oneness is powerful enough to overcome every reason they might have to be separated or apart.

One Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in the body of all believers. His presence gives them a common experience and a common power that makes them one in heart and comradeship, in spite of any differences they might have because of background or experiences. The Spirit of God molds all those in whom He dwells into one fellowship.

One hope of your calling. The great hope to which God has called all who believe is that in the end all differences will end and all things will be bound together into one great family of love. Every believer has that same hope, and that hope gives each one a common expectation that makes all temporary separating factors in this world insignificant.

One Lord. Every true Christian has only one Master. He is Jesus. Believers through the ages have died rather than accept any other Master. All true believers seek always to do His will, because He rules, directs, and controls their lives. Christians may disagree on how to describe or define their Master, but they all agree that He and He alone rules their lives. His lordship draws them together with a binding power nothing can sever.

One faith. The true faith of Christians is the trust they place in Jesus when they accept Him as Savior. Christians sometimes speak of "my faith" or "your faith," referring to different faith groups or different doctrinal beliefs. Paul was not talking about faith in that sense. He meant trust in Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Master. True believers trust in Jesus alone for salvation and hope. Their shared faith in Jesus gives them a communion stronger than any other in the whole world.

One baptism. Baptism is the God-given method by which new believers publically identify with Jesus and become official members of His church. That initial act of uniting with Jesus' people and program in the world gives them commitment to one great overriding cause. Unfortunately, baptism is the one area that believers have disagreed about and argued over more than any of the others Paul mentioned. It has actually become a source of disharmony among believers, instead of a source of harmony. It is sad that even God's people can corrupt and abuse one of Jesus'

most precious sources of harmony. Even so, the basic meaning of a public demonstration of one's commitment to Jesus and His church remains as a declaration that all Christians hold in common, in spite of all disagreements over details.

One God and Father of all. All true Christians believe in only one God. He is powerful, magnificent, manifold, and multifaceted; but all of His facets blend together in one omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent God. He is totally consistent and the same in every age, every land, every nationality, and every nation in the whole world. He is so superior to every created thing that He is actually three Persons united in one, yet He is not three personalities. He has divided functions among Himself, but all of Him is present and powerful in His every act. One Person serves as Planner and Director. The Second serves as Performer and Doer. The Third serves as Supporter and Sustainer. However, all Three are involved in the work and activities of the other Two, and not One is present or active without the others. The One Triune God is Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Finisher of all things. Nothing exists without His attention and nothing moves without His notice. No one and no thing escapes His presence. Theologians express those truths with big and powerful words, such as "God is transcendent; God is immanent; God is incarnate." Paul expressed the same truths in much simpler and much clearer words: He said: God is above and beyond everything, yet God is with and throughout everything; better still God is within and inside of all of you who trust Him.": Though He is present and active everywhere, yet He is in believers in a truly distinct and highly significant way. As such, He is Father to everything that exists outside Himself, but in all of His actions He is one united all-sufficient, all-powerful God. All true believers submit to that one Father God, giving them a source of harmony that outweighs every reason for division.

Believers have such powerful sources of harmony, we should concentrate on them and not let any differences separate us from loving and communing with every other believer in Jesus. We may not be able to settle all the ways we disagree in doctrine and in practice until the End, but we still should allow the sources of harmony that we hold in

common overcome every difference and enable us to have genuine comradeship together in Jesus.

2. [Walk in diversity of grace gifts] (4:7-16)
 - a. [The source of the diversity of grace gifts] (4:7-10):
 - (1) ***But yet a grace-gift is given to each one of us according to the allotted amount of Christ's gift*** (4:7)
 - (2) ***For it*** [Psalm 68:18] ***says:*** (4:8)
 - (a) **"Going up on high** (4:8b)
 - (b) **"He shall captivate captivity** (4:8c)
 - (c) **"And He shall give gifts to men."** (4:8d)
 - (3) ***So now what is "He shall go up" except that also He went down first into the lower parts of the earth*** (4:9-10)?
 - (a) ***The One going down is also the One going up above all the heavens*** (4:10a)
 - (b) ***That He might fill all things*** (4:10b).
 - b. [Examples of the diversity of grace gifts]: ***And He gave*** (4:11):
 - (1) ***Some*** [to be] ***apostles*** (4:11b)
 - (2) ***And some*** [to be] ***prophets*** (4:11c)
 - (3) ***And some*** [to be] ***evangelists*** (4:11d)
 - (4) ***And some*** [to be] ***shepherds and teachers*** (4:11e).
 - c. [The purpose of the diversity of grace gifts] (4:12)
 - (1) ***For the equipping of the saints*** (4:12a)
 - (2) ***In*** [the] ***work of ministry*** (4:12b)
 - (3) ***Unto building up of the body of Christ*** (4:12c)
 - d. [The goal of the diversity of grace gifts] (4:13-16)
 - (1) ***Until we all come to harmony*** (4:13a-13c)
 - (a) ***In the faith*** (4:13b)
 - (b) ***And in the knowledge of God's Son*** (4:13c)
 - (2) ***Unto a finished man*** (4:13d-16)
 - (a) ***Unto the dimension of the mature fullness of Christ*** (4:13e)
 - (b) ***So that we no longer may be little children*** (4:14)
 - [1] ***Tossed about*** (4:14b)
 - [2] ***And blown around by every doctrinal wind*** (4:14c-14e)
 - [a] ***Through the trickery of men*** (4:14d)
 - [b] ***Through shrewdness*** (4:14e)
 - [c] ***By the deception of straying*** (4:14f)
 - (c) ***But instead*** (4:15-16),
 - [1] ***Speaking the truth in love*** (4:15b),
 - [2] ***We must grow up into Him in every way who is the Head, that is, Christ*** (4:15c-16),
 - [a] ***By whom the whole body is being fitted together and joined together*** (4:16a-16f),
 - {1} ***Through every assisting fastener*** (4:16e),
 - {2} ***According to the function measured out to each part*** (4:16f),
 - [b] ***Producing growth of the body*** (4:16g-16i)
 - {1} ***Toward building itself up*** (4:16h)
 - {2} ***In love*** (4:16i).

Paul began this section of his letter with two little words that signaled he was going to discuss a contrasting idea. The words are literally “In but,” an expression that does not communicate in English. Together, the two words mean something akin to “But yet.” Paul used them to indicate he was turning to a different but related thought. Most English versions translate the expression simply as “But”; however, the two words together make a stronger contrast than is communicated by a simple “But.” Paul used the stronger statement to indicate that what he had just said was true, but yet what he was about to say was also true. He recognized that the two ideas seem to be opposites, but they are not. The two ideas complement each other and belong together.

Even though Paul exulted over the power of God to bring harmony to His people, he hastened to declare an equally important contrasting truth. Unity in Christ does not mean sameness. It makes room for a wide range of diversity. God’s people are not identical, and He does not deal with them in identical ways. Just as every flower is different and every tree is different and every bird is different and every star is different, just so every child of God is different. Therefore, God has different tasks and different gifts for different people, so that each person can fill his own unique place in God’s kingdom and in God’s work. Diversity is a characteristic of the way God uses people. Paul especially emphasized the way God uses a diversity of gifts to empower His people for a wide variety of places of service.

The diversity among God’s people that Paul stressed was that God gives a different grace-gift to each believer according to the place of service He allots to that person. That diversity does not imply conflict. It means that each servant of Christ works at his own assignment in his own way to complement the work of other believers for the good of the whole.

Verses 7-10. The source of the diversity of grace-gifts.

Paul used three words when he spoke of God’s gifts in verse 7. He used the verb “give” and the noun “gift,” both of which refer to any kind of gift. But when he described the gift that God distributes to believers, he used the word “grace.” When he did so, he was not referring to the characteristic of gracious generosity or loving-kindness that is a part of God’s nature but to gracious bestowals that God’s generosity gives on His people. Though the word Paul used for those bestowals was simply “grace,” most versions translate the word as “gift” to acknowledge that Paul was talking about specific blessings God gives to His workers. However, neither the word “grace” nor the word “gift” conveys Paul’s true meaning; therefore, it is translated above as “grace-gift.” Grace-gifts are gifts that come from and through God’s grace.

Paul’s initial statement about grace-gifts in verse 7 reveals two significant truths about them. (1) They are Christ’s gifts. They come from Jesus. They cannot be gained from any other source. Only Jesus can give them. Since Paul used the word “grace” to describe those gifts, it is evident that they were blessings granted out of God’s goodness for His own purposes and out of His own will. Grace-gifts are not talents with which a person is born, and they are not skills that a person develops. They are not abilities hidden inside a person that the person needs to search out and find so he can use them for God. They are abilities he does not naturally possess and cannot learn from any amount of instruction or training. They are special bestowals granted out of God’s grace to enable a person to do a work that natural human abilities cannot accomplish.

(2) They are allotted to each person individually. The word translated “allotted amount” means “measure.” Translated literally, Paul’s words are “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” They mean that Jesus measures out the type and amount of gifts that He grants to each person. He measures them out according to each person’s need and His choice.

Paul then quoted Psalm 68:18 to support his position on grace-gifts. When Paul quoted the verse, he apparently quoted it from the Septuagint Greek translation, as was his usual practice. He quoted the Septuagint translation of the verse verbatim, except that he made one noticeable variation. To understand the significance of that variation, it is necessary to compare the Hebrew original with the Septuagint Greek translation and with Paul's quotation of the verse in Ephesians 4:7. However, evaluating the comparison is complicated because of various views about the time indicated by the verbs of the verse. The Hebrew text uses the perfect state for each of the three verbs, and the Greek Septuagint uses the aorist "tense" for each. Hebrew verbs do not contain time significance, and neither does the Greek aorist tense. In both languages the time of the action must be determined by the context. By contrast, in English it is impossible to translate the verbs without using a tense form. Thus the context is extremely important in understanding the meaning of Paul quotation from Psalm 68.

All English versions translate the verbs in that verse in past tense, because it has traditionally been the habit of grammarians and translators to translate a Hebrew verb in the perfect state into an English verb in the past tense unless the context absolutely demands a different tense. The result has been considerable confusion in many prophetic texts. I do not consider myself to be wiser than the experts, but I would like to propose that the context of Psalm 68:18 is future.

The heading of Psalm 68 says that David wrote it. In Verses 1-14, David remembered past occasions when God won great victories over evil men and nations. Verses 15-18 give strong evidence that they point toward future days when God will win even greater victories. Verse 15 admires the majesty of the mountains in Bashan, the area Israel occupied east of the Jordan River. Verse 16 asks why the mountain of Bashan are jealous of the mountain where Jehovah desires to live forever. The mountain where Jehovah desires to live forever is not Jerusalem, as so many interpreters assume. It is heaven. Verse 17 says God has ten thousands and thousands of thousands of chariots and is among them in "Sinai in the holiness". Even if we

say that the chariots are spiritual war machines, nothing anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures indicates that God ever used any such overwhelming conquering force at Sinai, at Jerusalem, or at any other location. So where is "Sinai in the holiness"? It is not in physical Sinai. It is in heaven, where everything is holy. David said God has millions of chariots there and He is in the midst of them. The implication is that the Lord is waiting for the day when He will use them to win even greater victories. The psalm does not say when or how that day will come, but it does declare that God has the forces ready for whenever He chooses to use them.

In verse 18, David spoke of another day of victory for God. He described a day when God goes up to "the height," takes captivity captive, and takes gifts "in men." One has to strain his imagination beyond reason to find any time in history that could fulfill those words. David must have been talking about some great future day when He will overwhelm His enemies and win a mighty victory over them. Therefore, the context indicates verse 18 should be translated in future tense. If it is so translated, a strictly literal translation of the verse into English is: "***You shall go up to the height; You shall captivate captivity; You shall take gifts in man.***" The Septuagint Greek version from which Paul quoted follows the Hebrew original strictly, except that it changes "go up" from 2nd person indicative to an aorist participle, and it changes "shall captivate" from 2nd person singular to 3rd person singular. Thus it reads literally, "***Going up on high, He shall captivate captivity; You shall take gifts in man.***"

When Paul quoted the verse in Ephesian 4:8, he quoted it exactly like the Septuagint translation, except he clarified the meaning of the third clause. He quoted the verse as "***Going up on high, He shall captivate captivity; and He shall give gifts to men.***" The question that Paul's quotation raises is, Did Paul take undue liberties with the text when he changed the word "shall take" to "shall give"? To answer that question, it is necessary to examine each version of the verse carefully.

The Hebrew verb in the original text strictly means "took." Like so many common words in

every language, it has various usages. It can be used to mean “take away,” so that at times it takes on the meaning of “to extract” or “to take from.” However, it also can be used to mean “to fetch” or “to go after something to bring it back,” so that at times it takes on the meaning “to get something for someone” or “to give”. Therefore, the verse can legitimately be taken to mean Jesus took gifts from men, and it can just as legitimately be understood to mean Jesus got gifts for men.

The Septuagint translation of the words follows the Hebrew exactly in translating the word “took.” It translates the Hebrew word for “took” into a Greek word that has the same meaning: “took.” In addition, the Greek word for “took” has exactly the same variations in meaning as the Hebrew word. It leaves unsettled the question of what Jesus did with the gifts, just as the Hebrew original does.

The prepositions used after the verb “took” in the Hebrew original and in the Septuagint Greek translation both mean “in.” It would seem that the prepositions favor the interpretation “took for” rather than “took from,” because it is much more natural to use the preparation “in” with regard to a gift given to someone than with regard to a gift taken away from someone. However, interpreters, translators, and commentators have taken opposite positions on the correct meaning.

This uncertainty explains why Paul varied the wording of his quotation of the verse. He quoted the verse in a way that settles the question and clarifies the meaning of the verb “took.” He wrote, “. . . ***And He shall give gifts to men.***” He used words that clearly show which possible meaning of the original words is correct. He did not change the meaning, but he cleared up any question about what the words mean. He took the position that they were a prophecy that Jesus was going to give gifts to men, not that Jesus was going to take gifts from men. By the time Paul wrote Ephesians, the prophecy had been fulfilled, and the gifts had been given. Since Paul was writing Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the translation Paul used should be accepted as a divinely inspired interpretation of the meaning of the Hebrew words. The verse as correctly interpreted by Paul talks

about gifts Jesus gave to believers when He ascended into heaven.

Allow this writer the privilege of offering a word of advice. Translators are constantly tempted to do what Paul did and use their translations to explain passages that have a questionable meaning. If we as translators are sure we have the same inerrant inspiration that Paul had when he wrote to the Ephesians, we can feel free to make those clarifications. However, if we do not have that kind of inspiration and are dependent on our own abilities as translators, we are on much safer grounds to do what the Septuagint translators did and translate literally word-for-word and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to each reader and help him understand the very words that God inspired. The Holy Spirit will provide readers with much more dependable guidance than any translator can give.

After quoting the verse, in verses 9-11a Paul explained what it meant. His explanation establishes these points:

(1) Jehovah in Psalm 68:15-18 is a prophecy about Jesus. Paul established that point by calling attention to the statement in Psalm 68:18 that God “shall go up.” He said the One who was going to go up had to first go down. Then he confirmed that statement by saying the One who was going to go down was also the One who was going to go up. When Paul was writing, the prophecy had already been fulfilled, and Paul could declare that it was talking about Jesus. No one doubts that Paul referred to Jesus when he made those statements, which was the point Paul was seeking to establish. So Paul understood Psalm 68:18 to be a prophecy of Jesus’ great victory over sin.

In Psalm 68:15-18, David strongly affirmed that the One he was talking about was God by the names he used to refer to Him. In verse 15, he called that One “God.” In verse 16, he called Him “Jehovah.” In verse 27, he called him “God” and “Lord.” In verse 18, he called Him “Jehovah God.” He left no doubt that the One who “shall go up” was Jehovah God. Paul interpreted the words to refer to Jesus. Was his conclusion valid? By all means, it was. Jesus is God, and Jehovah God is the only God who exists. Paul was exactly literal in

applying these verses to Jesus and in saying that Jesus is the One who went up and the One who gave gifts to men.

(2) Jesus' "going up" refers to His ascension into heaven. Paul made that clear when he described Him as "*the One going up above all heavens that He might fill all things.*" Those words have only one application, and that application is to Jesus' ascension into heaven. Interpreters of Paul's words all are agreed that Paul was talking about Jesus' ascension.

Paul's words also described the purpose of Jesus' ascension into heaven. He said Jesus returned to heaven "*that He might fill all things,*" meaning, He resumed the appointed position God had given Him before the foundation of the world, which was to create, reveal truth, save, and rule the whole created universe. While living on the earth, Jesus limited Himself from being in control of all things so He could live on the earth as a man. When He ascended back to heaven, even though He continued to be God/man, He resumed the authority the Father had given Him to be His Agent and concerning all things related to the created cosmos. Such a claim has never been made for anyone in all history except Jesus. Paul clearly asserted that Psalm 68:18 referred to Jesus ascension into heaven and His authority in heaven.

(3) Jesus is also the One who went down "into the lower parts of the earth." Paul was specific on that point. He said, "*The One going down is also the One going up above all the heavens.*" Interpreters are not in agreement about what those words mean. Many interpreters understand them to mean that Jesus went to hell after his death on the Cross. Volumes have been written to explain what Jesus did when He was in hell for three days while his body was in the grave. Thus, the idea that He went to hell between His death and His resurrection is a view that intrigues many people. In spite of the many who espouse that view, two major problems exist with it. One problem is that it assumes that hell is located under the earth. The Bible gives no hint anywhere that hell is under the earth. First Samuel 28:11-14, which tells that Samuel came up out of the earth in response to Saul's use of the services of the witch of

Endor, has been used as evidence that hell is under the earth. That verse actually says nothing about the location of hell, because Samuel was one of God's greatest prophets. He certainly did not go to hell when he died, so his coming up out of the earth cannot mean he was called up from hell by the witch, by Samuel, or by anyone else. Samuel came up out of the earth because his body was under the earth in a grave. That passage does not even hint that hell is under the earth, and neither does any other Bible passage when it is rightly interpreted. The idea that hell is in the center of the earth is a mountain of hypothetical doctrine built on no foundation at all. The idea that Jesus went to hell between his crucifixion and his resurrection does not have Scriptural support. The other problem with the view that Jesus' "going down" meant that He went to hell after His death is that Jesus commended His spirit to God at His death, which certainly means His spirit went to be with God, far away from hell, while his body was in the grave (Luke 23:46).

A much simpler and much more meaningful explanation of Paul's words is based on clear and definite facts that are accepted by all Christians. After Jesus' death, his body was taken down from the Cross and buried in a sepulcher carved into the side of a mountain. His body went down into the earth when he was buried. "The lower parts of the earth" are indeed underground, but not in hell. The expression "the lower parts of the earth" means the grave. Paul was referring to Jesus' burial in a sepulcher, which was lower than the surface of the mountain into which it was carved. It was totally natural for Paul to mention Jesus' burial in connection with His ascension, because Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, and ascension are related doctrines that together explain Jesus' power to save from sin.

(4) Paul did not explain the words "captivated captivity." Evidently he assumed those words would be almost automatically understood. They are easily understood to mean that when Jesus ascended He took captivity to sin away with Him, because He had provided a way for men to be freed from sin.

(5) The gifts Jesus gave to men as He ascended into heaven are grace-gifts. Paul spent the

next six verses explaining the meaning and diversity of grace-gifts.

Verse 11b. Examples of the diversity of grace-gifts. Paul began his explanation of the meaning of grace-gifts by giving some examples. He listed four of the grace-gifts Jesus bestows on believers. They are “apostles,” “prophets,” “evangelists,” and “shepherds and teachers.” By “apostles,” Paul meant “missionaries.” By “prophets,” he meant “preachers.” By “evangelists,” he seems to have meant traveling witnesses to the saving gospel. By “shepherds and teachers,” he meant pastors of churches.

All of those gifts are places of service. They are jobs that Jesus gives men to do for Him. They are not places of service that a person can choose for himself. They are places of service given or assigned to men by Jesus. It takes a call from God to be able to adequately fill any of those places of service. A divine call into a place of leadership in Jesus’ work is a blessed and holy gift that deserves the highest respect.

However, grace-gifts are also powers God gives to perform the places of service He assigns. When Jesus calls a person to a place of service, He also gives that person the ability to perform that task. The person is not left on his own. He is empowered to do what Jesus calls him to do. The places of service Paul mentioned are tasks that cannot be adequately carried out either by talents or by education and training. They are places of service that deal with people’s souls and spiritual lives and that are for the purpose of changing people’s lives. Those tasks can only be accomplished through the power of God. Therefore, when Jesus gives a person a place of service, He also gives that person power to do what he could never do on his own. Grace-gifts are places of service and Spirit-empowered abilities to accomplish those places of service. The job and the gift go together. God does not give grace-gifts to people without a place to use them, because it would be a waste of His power. However, He also does not give a place of service without supplying the grace-gift needed to perform it, because that would leave the person frustrated and defeated.

It must be recognized that Paul did not intend to name all possible grace-gifts. He only gave examples, so these few verses do not answer all the questions that can be asked about grace-gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, Paul gave a different list of grace-gifts, and that list contains only one of the grace-gifts mentioned in this verse. In those verses, he listed: *“a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, faith, healings, doing miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, varieties of languages, and interpretation of languages.”* The list in 1 Corinthians clarifies that grace-gifts are much more numerous and varied than a few key leadership positions in the church. By no means do the two lists together include every possible grace-gift. Their scope is broad enough to include any and all types of service for Christ that the Holy Spirit might lead a person to undertake. The use of grace-gifts is just as applicable to Bible teachers, music leaders, youth leaders, deacons, ushers, personal witnesses, child care workers, visitors to shut-ins, and any other places of service for Jesus as it is to missionaries and pastors. Any place of service for Jesus is a sacred responsibility. It should not be undertaken unless the Holy Spirit leads the person to do it, and then that person should expect the Holy Spirit to empower him to perform the task in a way that is able to move people within toward God. Without the calling and the gift, any place of service is just a job. With the calling and the gift, it becomes a life-influencing, God-honoring, spiritual ministry. The calling comes first, and the grace-gift is added when the person says, “Yes.” Do not look for an ability that you have and then find a way to use it. Accept the job the Spirit gives you, no matter how much it is beyond your abilities, attempt it, and watch the Holy Spirit use you to do an impossible spiritual work in somebody’s life.

Verse 12. The purpose of the diversity of grace-gifts. Paul went on to explain the purpose for which God gives grace-gifts to people. As verse 12 is translated in KJV, it sounds like Paul described three purposes. As written in the Greek text, the verse describes three aspects of one purpose, and the three aspects follow each other in natural sequence. The purpose of grace-gifts is to enable men to equip believers for service, so they can do the work of ministering, in order to build up the body of Christ.

The first aspect of the purpose for grace-gifts is to empower the grace-gifted person to equip others for service. The word translated “equip” means “to mend,” or “to place in order,” or “to complete.” All three uses of the word apply to the work of men who receive grace-gifts. Their task is to mend the flaws in the lives of God’s people that hinder their service to Jesus. Their task also includes helping Jesus’ people arrange their lives in order, so they can be effective for Christ. In addition, it includes inspiring and guiding others into complete commitment to Jesus, so they will not be distracted as they work for Him. The broad spectrum of their responsibilities is summarized by saying their task is to equip believers for service. Men with grace-gifts are not called and gifted so they can do all of Jesus’ work by themselves. They also are not called and gifted to make them feel good, and the power is not given to them just so they can show off how powerful they are. They are gifted to inspire and train others to work for Jesus. Jesus calls His leaders to be servants to others by teaching and training them to serve. Some people seem to be born leaders, but Jesus’ real leaders are those who spend their lives developing others. They do not exalt themselves. They do not lord it over others. They do not demand honor or praise from others. They spend their lives developing others, so that they multiply themselves over and over again in Jesus’ service.

The second aspect of the purpose for grace-gifts is so their training will result in their becoming workers or ministers themselves. The word translated “ministry” means “service.” Jesus expects all of His followers to be in service, actively working for Him. He does not call anyone to be an observer or a pew-sitter only. He certainly does not call anyone to be a critic of the work of others. He calls all of His servants to be actively working for Him. Gifted leaders do not train others just for the sake of the training. The purpose is not just to build them into super Christians. It is to train them to be busy in serving. It takes many types of service to do God’s work, so not every believer is to be trained for the same work. In addition, not everyone doing the same type of work will perform it in the same way. So gifted men must train others in many varied tasks and many varied methods.

Diversity must be a characteristic of both the trainers and the workers.

The third aspect of the purpose for grace-gifts is to build up Jesus’ body. His body is the totality of all believers. Jesus is the Head who guides every one. Believers are His hands, feet, eyes, ears, and especially His tongues to spread the good news about Him everywhere. During Jesus’ forty days on earth between His resurrection and ascension, He emphasized to His disciples that they were responsible to evangelize, baptize, and teach all over the world. He is still concerned that all believers continue that effort until everyone hears. Those are the methods that build up His body. The job is not finished. It will never be finished until all of God’s people are trained and occupied with enlarging His body and until His body encompasses the whole world.

The task of grace-gifted people is tremendous in scope and in character. It cannot be done by human effort alone. The purpose of grace-gifts is to give people power to do a spiritual work in other people’s lives in the face of an evil and hostile world. Only grace-gifts from the Holy Spirit make it possible to accomplish such a task.

The goal of the diversity of grace-gifts. Finally, Paul described the goal toward which Jesus’ gifting and believers’ working leads. They lead all of God’s people toward two great spiritual achievements: harmony with each other (v. 13a-13c) and spiritual maturity within themselves (vs. 13d-16).

Concerning harmony, Paul said the goal of grace-gifts is to eventually bring all of God’s people into harmony in faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son. When Jesus is finished with His work with people, we all will share alike a deep and sincere faith in God and a full understanding of Jesus and all His teachings. When we all share a like faith and knowledge, no more excuse will exist for the kind of disputes and divisions that have plagued the church through the years. Therefore, we all will live in perfect peace and harmony with each other. When the goal of grace-gifts is reached, the great day Paul talked about throughout this letter

will be accomplished. Harmonious unity will reign over the entire cosmos.

Concerning spiritual maturity, Paul said the goal of spiritual gifts is that every believer “*will come unto the dimension of the mature fullness of Christ.*” The word translated “dimension” means “measure.” The word is used to refer to the instrument, ruler, or vessel used to measure quantities, weights, or distances. It is also used to refer to the measurements or the dimensions required for an article or ingredient. The word is used in the second sense in this verse. The dimension that is the goal for every believer is to be like the mature fullness of Christ. It is a stupendous, breath-taking goal; but God will be satisfied with nothing less, and He intends to keep grace-gifted people working toward that goal until the day of perfection comes.

Paul described spiritual immaturity as being tossed about and blown around. “Tossed about” is an expression used to describe being thrown around by boisterous waves. “Blown around” is an expression used to describe being carried away by strong winds. The waves and winds that push immature believers back and forth and from side to side are “every doctrinal wind.” Being influenced by ever-changing, constantly-shifting doctrines is a sign of childishness in the faith. Immature or worldly oriented people never seem to be satisfied with the long-revealed truths of God. Like the philosophers Paul met in Athens, they are always seeking to speak or to hear some new idea. Amazingly, the most learned of men of every age are the very ones who get carried away with every new teaching fad or form of belief. Therefore, we all need to recognize that grasping at every new doctrinal idea is not a sign of true wisdom, but a sign of spiritual immaturity. It comes from the deception of men instead of from the truth of God. It comes from human shrewdness instead of from God’s wisdom, and it comes from the straying into sin instead of the walking the straight and narrow with God.

That statement does not mean that people should cease to search for new knowledge. It means that true teachings about God never change. The truths God revealed long ago are the true

doctrines that lead people out of spiritual immaturity. Those doctrines are found in the Word of God.

The words Paul used in verse 14 to describe signs of immaturity are highly instructive. Those words are “trickery,” “shrewdness,” “deception,” and “straying.” The word translated “trickery” is derived from throwing dice. Because gamblers were known for dishonesty, the word derived from throwing dice was used to describe people’s tendency to lie, cheat, and deceive. Chasing after every new doctrinal frill comes from the same tendency.

The word translated “shrewdness” comes from a root meaning “skillful,” but it was often used in a bad sense to mean skilled in leading others astray. It reminds us of Jesus’ words in Luke 16:8 that “*the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*” (KJV). Jesus meant the people of the world are busier devising new ways to promote themselves than believers are in discovering new ways to spread the truth. Both are signs of spiritual immaturity.

The word translated “deception” comes from a root that means “organized” or “well arranged.” The English words “method” and “methodical” are derived from that Greek word. Paul used it to mean that evil men often plan well their attacks on truth and present them in well organized and convincing ways. Evil men are highly deceptive and yet convincing, but they convince people with erroneous human reason instead of the Word of God.

The word translated “straying” comes from a root that means “to wander.” Paul used it to show that erroneous ideas and evil deeds wander away from the path that leads to truth and righteousness. They wander away into dangerous paths and are lost.

Immature believers are easily tossed back and forth by all of those influences. When we allow ourselves to be led around and back and forth by supposedly new and deeper ideas, we reveal that we are spiritually immature. We need to grow up and become mature believers by studying God’s Truth and sticking by what the Word says regardless of

what some self-promoting guru or supposedly learned man might say.

In verses 15-16, Paul described spiritual maturity in strongly contrasting terms. He said it consists of speaking the truth in love and of growing up in Christ to become like Him in every way.

Truth and love are often considered to be opponents. Some hide the truth because they feel it might hurt someone's feelings, and that would be unloving. Some ignore love by telling unvarnished facts in a harsh way regardless of whom it hurts. The mature Christian finds a way to avoid both errors. He learns to tell the truth in a loving way. Thus he joins truth and love together and demonstrates that he has learned the meaning of spiritual maturity.

Growing up to be like Christ in every way means allowing Christ to fit us into a constructive relationship with others. Paul said Jesus fits us together and joins us together. He was using the analogy of cutting lumber or carving stones into shapes that correspond with each other and then placing them together so that they join in constructing a magnificent building. Jesus fits and joins people of different sizes, different talents, and different skills into one whole fellowship that

Conclusion. It takes both harmony and variety to grow God's people into an effective body for Him. We need to cultivate both togetherness and diversity to walk worthy of Jesus' calling. As we do, we grow toward spiritual maturity.

ESSAY ON GRACE-GIFTS

Not a great number of years ago a new approach to spiritual gifts was suggested to churches. It was to teach people to search for their spiritual gifts and then find ways to use those gifts in God's service. When I first heard the idea commended, I said, "If that approach ever gets accepted widely among churches, their effectiveness will begin to decline." Unfortunately, from my point of view the idea spread like wildfire among almost all churches. It spread across denominational lines, and books were written by many authors to assure people that every believer has a spiritual gift. They were told they only needed to find what their spiritual gifts were and then use them to serve Christ. Every Christian was assured that he already had what he needed to serve Christ. He only needed to locate it and use it. No doubt many will be surprised and some will be indignant that I would question that kind of teaching. However, I do ask you to observe that since that approach has become popular, almost all Christian churches in America have declined in influence and effectiveness. You may disagree that the popular approach to spiritual gifts has anything to do with the decline of church influence, church memberships, and conversions; but I ask you to consider my reasons for saying it does.

becomes the body of Christ doing His work in this world. Paul said Jesus uses "every assisting fastener" to accomplish that unity. He uses people with special skills and events with special significance to bind His body together in a strong and tenacious fellowship of service to Him. Maturity does not mean standing alone. It means allowing Jesus to fit us into a comradeship that advances both Jesus' church and also its every member.

Then Paul described the end result of all that building. It is to build up the whole body of Christ. Christ's body actually builds itself. As believers work together they become stronger and more advanced in knowledge and holiness. They also add to their number. They do it all by growing and working in love. Thus, Christ's body becomes both better and bigger. The whole church advances nearer and nearer to the ultimate goal of all believers becoming spiritually mature like Jesus. Then Jesus will be able to usher in the ultimate triumph of giving harmony to all parts of the entire cosmos.

Every topic Paul discussed in Ephesians ended with the theme he stressed throughout the book: unity in Christ.

Telling people that they have a spiritual gift and that they just need to find it is equivalent to telling them that doing God's work is a human effort using human abilities. It equates grace-gifts with human talents; and it tells people that if they will just develop their talents, they will have all they need to do God's work. The problem with that view is that God's work is a divine and spiritual work that changes peoples' lives and transfers people from the road that leads to hell to the road that leads to heaven. That kind of accomplishment cannot be achieved by human effort, no matter how strenuous the effort is; and it cannot be accomplished by human talent, no matter how spectacular and developed those talents might be. God's work just cannot be done in human strength alone. When we teach people to search for their "spiritual gifts" and use them, we are deceiving them into believing they can do a God-sized work with their in-born human abilities. We are setting them up for disappointment and defeat.

The Bible is clear that reaching people's hearts and minds and changing their lives can only be done by a person who is an instrument in God's hands. It requires a person who has been given a supernatural power by the Holy Spirit to penetrate deeper than peoples' skins and deeper than their ears. Supernatural does not mean spectacular. It means a work accomplished by God in somebody's heart and life. That kind of work may happen quietly, but it requires a person empowered to reach into their souls. Grace-gifts are for the purpose of giving believers that kind of power.

Don't mistake enthusiasm, energy, excitement, emotion, or hard work for grace-gifts. Those and many other good qualities can become powerless substitutes for the power of the Holy Spirit to fill a person's life and enable him to do an eternal work in someone's heart and life. Grace-gifts are not necessarily spectacular, showy, or miraculous. They can be exercised through very ordinary actions and words. The way a person with a grace-gift differs from one who does not have a grace-gift is that he is able to touch people's souls and change people's lives. He may not be as interesting or entertaining as others, but something about his presence arouses people's hearts to reach out for God. People, churches, communities, and sometimes whole populations turn around and begin to seek for God, for love, and for righteousness, instead of desiring only fun, food, and folly. It takes a work of God to enable a person to accomplish such a task, and that work of God comes when people stop thinking they can accomplish God's work with their efforts and begin surrendering to God to let Him fill them with a power they cannot describe or explain. When people make that change, they begin to be impelled to do things they would never think of doing on their own, and they see things begin to happen they would never expect.

The Bible has many expressions to describe when that kind of empowering comes on a person. Some of those expressions are: "The Spirit came on him"; "They were all filled with the Spirit"; "The Spirit fell on him;" "The Spirit led him"; "The Spirit moved him"; "The Spirit spoke through him"; "The Spirit drove Him"; "The Spirit used him." Amazingly, something different happened in every case where the Bible describes God's moving in that way. God did a special work for each occasion. The common denominator was that a work of God took place that could not be expected, planned, or adequately explained. God just gave the person a gift to do what God wanted done in peoples' lives at that time. Grace-gifts still work the same way. Because grace-gifts are works of God, they are tremendously varied; and they never duplicate what was done on a different occasion. One person may receive a grace-gift that lasts a lifetime. Another person's grace-gift may come and go as needed. The one element they hold in common is that God uses each one to effect a spiritual change in people's lives that could never have accomplished by human effort.

Now here is an amazing reality about spiritual gifts. The only way for a person to tell if he has a grace-gift is for him to use it. A weight-lifter has no way of knowing how much weight he can lift until he grabs hold of a weight and attempts to lift it. A runner has no way of knowing how far or how fast he can run until he tests himself on the track. A soldier has no way of knowing how he will hold up under fire until he goes into battle. And a worker for Jesus has no idea what God will enable him to accomplish until he undertakes the task to which God calls him. If a person is aware that God is calling him to a task, he is not free to sit and say he will

undertake the task when he knows God has given him the gift to be able to perform it. He must lay hold on the task and see what God will do. The call to a task comes first, then the faith to undertake it, then the power to perform it, and then the amazing spiritual results.

God has always worked in that way. He did not begin to give grace-gifts to His followers on a certain day in history, and He did not end it on a certain day. It happened in the Old Testament just as amazingly as in the New Testament. It still happens today when we let God do the doing. It happens when we quit thinking we can do a spiritual work like teach the Bible or witness to the lost or preach a sermon or deliver a tract through our own knowledge and skill. It happens when we surrender to Jesus, give the Holy Spirit freedom to do His work His way, go where God leads us to go, and say what God tells us to say when we get there. It is amazing what God is able to accomplish when we turn loose and let ourselves become instruments in His hands. Then He empowers us, and we see Him accomplish surprising works through us.

May I give you two examples that have been important in my life?. When I was a newly-saved nine-year-old boy, a lady member of our church named Tempe Savoy, who lived three blocks from my house, started a Royal Ambassador chapter. I attended the meetings, sometimes in her home, sometimes in the church, and sometimes in the park. I didn't notice she was different or strange, but I was puzzled twice when she called me on the telephone and told me to turn the radio to a certain frequency because she had found she could touch her radio in the back at a certain spot and broadcast to the world. I had never heard of schizophrenia, nervous breakdowns, or mental illness. I did not try to figure it out. I just kept going to R.A.'s. I began seeing tough boys become tender, indifferent boys become involved, and lost boys get saved. The group grew, and those who came learned to do all kinds of things they had never thought of before. She taught us about missions, and one day she gave me a book about David Livingstone and asked me to read it. I began to live David Livingstone's life over again through that book. I pictured myself right there with him when he explored parts of Africa where no white man had ever been, discovered the great Victoria Falls, fought a lion with his bare hands, and put forth strenuous efforts to oppose one native tribe from capturing people from other tribes and selling them into slavery. I imagined myself becoming a second David Livingstone. Later I learned that God did not need a second David Livingstone, but He did want me to do a work He designed just for me. God used Tempe Savoy, more than any other person, to let me know God was calling me into His special service. Later the pastor of our church told me Tempe Savoy was an example of a person who has no ability and enormous problems but whom God can use to do a good work for Him. Tempe Savoy had a grace-gift to do an impossible work with boys, and I will always be a testimony to the effectiveness of her gift.

When I was pastor of First Baptist Church in Houma, Louisiana, I was asked to visit a man named Roy DeSilvey, whom one of our deacons named Bill Ross had met on an oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. I went to visit Roy, but I was totally unprepared for what I found. He was a skilled mechanic on diesel engines and heavy oil field equipment, but he was angry and bitter. He was sitting in his living room without a shirt, with muscles bugling from every part of his torso. He was carving pieces for a two-foot model of an advanced tug boat, not from a box but from pieces of wood. His carving knife was sitting open on his coffee table. It did not take him long to tell me, "You came here to tell me what you believe. I will tell you what I believe. I believe the best thing we can do for America is put a stick of dynamite under every church and blow them all up." I immediately decided to get away from there as quickly as I could, but I said a strange thing. I was surprised at myself. I said, "Well, obviously you do not like churches, so let's not talk about churches. Let's talk about Jesus. Can you find anything wrong with him?" He said, "No," so I said, "The way we learn about Jesus is from the Bible. Do you have one?" He took several minutes to come out with a big family Bible that came from who knows where. I began to read from John 1:1. He snorted, fumed, and grunted; but I just kept reading. I had read seven chapters before he calmed down. Then I said, "Well, you see how good this is. It did not come out of my Bible, but out of yours. I am going to lay it here on the coffee table, so you can keep on reading when I am gone." I left thankful to get out with my life. I did not know until a couple of years later that he told his wife to go on to bed. Then he leaned over and started to read that Bible. After several minutes,

he took it up into his lap and read it until 2:30 in the morning. I got the shock of my life when he came to church the next morning. When I went to speak to him, he said, "Listen, I am just here to get you off of my back, so leave me alone." The Lord gave me a simple sermon that morning about the love of God. It was what Roy needed. He came back to the evening service and made no excuses. I got the courage to visit him again and he was full of questions. I kept visiting him nearly every Saturday and answering his questions. In the third month, his wife said, "Roy I know it is a sin for me to go to that church you go to, but I have got to go see what they have done to you. You have not gambled away one of your pay checks; you haven't gotten drunk once; you have even started talking nicely to me. May I go to that church with you next Sunday?" The next Sunday morning he brought her with him like she was the queen of the world. She never went back to her former church again. In another three months, they walked the aisle in our church hand in hand to publically confess Christ as their Savior; and they were baptized the following Sunday.

In another month, Roy was being invited to our mission churches to give his testimony. When he had given his testimony in all of our mission churches, one of them, which was without a pastor, asked him to preach for them the next Sunday. I was horrified. Roy was not ready for that—I thought. I called him Monday morning after he had preached on Sunday to ask him how it went. He said, "At the close of the service Sunday night, they asked me to be their interim pastor." I was more horrified, but God was pleased. For six months, he preached at one mission church on Saturday nights and at another on Sunday mornings. Amazingly the little mission churches grew until after a few months they and our church agreed to call a new pastor for them. Roy was miserable for two Sundays because he did not have a place to share what he had learned that week, so he said to me, "I am tired of hearing you talk about starting a new mission church on Coteau Road. It is time to do something about it." I said, "We need a new church there, and our church already sponsors five mission churches. That is as many as we can handle." He said, "Well, you might not be able to do it, but I can. I make a good salary. I am going out there, rent a house, and start preaching in it." I knew I could not fight him over it, so I said, "OK, let me get our church to vote to sponsor you. You pay whatever it costs, and we will see what happens." He started visiting up and down that bayou and had a rented house ready as a meeting place in about month. Over 30 people attended the first Sunday morning, and it grew from there. In a couple of years, they were able to call their own pastor, and he moved to a town in Texas to give up his secular work and to pastor a church there full time. I was even more displeased. After all the time we had invested in him, he was going to move to another state! To my absolute amazement, a few years later I attended a conference at Glorieta Baptist Assembly. Who should I find in one of the classes but Roy DeSilvey? I said, "Roy what are you doing here?" He said, "Well, an association in East Texas has called me to be their Director of Missions, and I thought I had better come and learn something about how to do it." I was absolutely disgusted that an association could be so foolish.

The association turned out to be totally dead. All the churches were declining, and three churches had closed in the previous two years. What do you think happened? Roy decided they needed something new to inspire them, so he got one of the churches to sponsor a new mission church. In two years, the association had three mission churches, and the churches that sponsored them had a new enthusiasm they had not had in years. The next thing I heard was that the Baptist General Convention of Texas had called Roy to be Church Planter Specialist for all of East Texas. Can you image anything so ridiculous? I did a little investigation, and I learned that the Texas Convention felt Roy could not hurt anything. The churches in East Texas were all so inactive nothing could be done to help them anyway. Roy took the position and worked at it for 12 years. In those years, Roy led the churches of East Texas to start 237 new churches; and the whole area had come alive. Then the Texas Convention asked Roy to see if he could start some black churches that would be affiliated with their Convention. In just a few years, the Convention had over a hundred affiliated black churches. The man who said he would like to put a stick of dynamite under every church in America and blow them all up led in starting more new churches in Texas than any other man in that time.

When Roy retired, one of the mission administrators in Texas said, "Roy DeSilvey is the smartest man I have ever known to have no education." Roy is uneducated only in the sense of how a person defines education. He is a skilled diesel mechanic and an accomplished seaman. He has explained to me Scriptures about boats and the sea that made them come alive because of his experience with the sea. Besides, along the way, he also managed to earn two years of credits at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has an insight into human nature that comes only from the school of experience guided by the Holy Spirit. He is uneducated only in the sense that he does not have a diploma to hang on his wall for an academic degree. Nevertheless, what the Lord did through Roy is not a matter of education. It is a matter of a grace-gift God gave him to do a work God called him to do. God picked the most unlikely candidate so He could demonstrate that His work is done through His power, not through the power of any person. God called Roy. Roy answered. God empowered Him with His unexplainable gift, and all the credit for the results belong to God.

Now may I tell you of something else I have seen? I have seen men start out to be ministers, go to college, go to seminary, learn to answer all the Bible questions, become eloquent public speakers, accept a call to be pastor of a church, and completely bomb out. I have not seen it once, but many times. Some fell away to sin. Some became enamored with psychology and became counselors. Some stirred up nothing but controversy. Some decided to get into business to make money. Some just got tired and gave up. And listen, after they turned away some of them got seriously ill, were critically injured in horrible accidents, became addicts, lost their families, died in a bizarre set of circumstances, or experienced some other tragedy. God's call into ministry is serious business. You do not refuse it or abuse it and get out unscarred. What was their problem? Very likely, they thought they could do Jesus' ministry in their own strength, and all their talents and training just were not enough. Why did not someone tell them they needed a call of God to touch a holy office? Or why did not someone tell them, they needed a grace-gift from God to accomplish the work God called them to do? Their whole lives might have been totally different.

I have seen lesser but still serious disappointments result from the efforts of people serving as Sunday School teachers, deacons, church musicians, and a host of other places of service. Some taught Bible classes where they had a lot of fun and enjoyed a great fellowship, but the classes never grew and no one ever was saved. Some sang musical notes perfectly, but no one's heart ever was broken. Some became tempted with sin and fell away from serving God. I truly believe the major problem with all of them was that someone made them believe their talents were enough to succeed in the place they chose to serve. Might not their record have been totally different if they had understood that they needed to be led of God to undertake a place of service for Him and, if God called them to a place of service no matter how small, they needed a grace-gift from God to accomplish what God called them to do? What they needed to do was open themselves to receive God's grace-gift, follow His leadership, and stand amazed that the result God would bring from their feeble efforts.

I do not claim to have wisdom or to be special in any way. In fact, I am the least qualified of all of God's servants, but I still want to share my conclusion from sixty-five years of ministry. We need to tell all of Jesus' servants, "You cannot do God's work by using your talents, intelligence, or education only, no matter how smart, talented, or educated you are. But, God can do His work through you if you will let Him take charge. He can give you the grace-gift you need to do what He has called you to do, and His gift will make all the difference. Turn loose, and let Him take charge. He will surprise you with what He will begin to do through you. You will find yourself engaged in a great dynamic fellowship, instead of a contest. You will find that your ordinary deeds will become invested with an amazing power to accomplish the unexpected. It will not be what you planned or expected, but it will be many times better. It might very well be the beginning of a whole new day of advance for the Kingdom of God. Or it might be that you will speak a word that touches the heart and lead to salvation one person who never before was responsive to God. Either way, the result will be a work of the Holy Spirit, given out of God's grace to advance the Kingdom and build Jesus' church."