

Professor Klyne Snodgrass (p. 217) thinks “*Our problem is that we have a million-dollar salvation and a five-cent response. We seem unimpressed with God’s salvation. We protest that no one can actually live worthy of this calling and express our fears of perfectionism.*” I wonder, “Would you say there’s truth to that statement?” Before answering, let’s read how God prefers we respond according to ***Ephesians 4:1-3: I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Christ calls us to eagerly walk in (1), maintain (3), and pursue (13) the bond of peace*** created by His crucifixion which not only proves that faith requires something of us, but also that it must be lived out in a committed community. I mean, we can’t “***one another***” without others, right? With that in mind, let’s unpack this....

BIG IDEA: Grace transforms us into responsible humans.

The New Testament refers to Christianity as [a one anothering faith](#) over 50 times! ***Ephesians 1-3*** explain how the graces we receive equip us to reconcile with ANY person for ANY reason. For instance, we can forgive because forgiveness has been lavished on us. Former strangers and enemies can now treat ***one another*** as family since the cross tore down walls that once divided. Clearly, the gospel aims to enable extraordinarily commitment relationships. Over the past few weeks, we explored 1 Corinthians 12 which concluded: “*Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*” Some say church membership is a needless human construct, but Scripture says believers must see ourselves as necessary members of Christ’s one body. In a world where selfish consumers like to keep open options, we commit to one local church as we do with a marriage or family to become responsible humans. Before adopting new church members today, we thought it might help to answer a few questions.

First: **What does it mean to be one in Christ?** *Verses 4-5* say it's at least 7 things: *There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* These are what we call our “core or high value” beliefs. Think of a dart board with a bullseye representing the central stuff upon which Christianity rises or falls (e.g. the virgin birth, the cross, the resurrection). Each concentric circle represents ideas that matter but are less foundational (e.g. baptism, communion, spiritual gifts, the hour of Christ's return). As ideas get farther from the bullseye, the more they go from absolutes, to convictions, to opinions. For example, sincere believers will disagree about who, when, and how to baptize, yet we all agree water baptism represents the ***one spirit baptism*** found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, “*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks (all races), slaves or free (all classes) --and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*” Letting children take communion is also a matter of conviction. Some, say that only baptized believers should be served. Others won't forbid children from approaching the Lord's table because God let them participate in Israel's Passover feast. At Landmark, we respect both positions and think parents should decide what's best for their kids. So, going forward, if your child isn't in this room when it's served, then we presume you don't want them to have it. Our deacons will no longer serve it in the classrooms.

Here's a second question: **What makes a gift “spiritual”?** Before answering, you should know that spiritual gifts are NOT like having x-ray vision or the ability to shoot webs from our wrists. Recall what we read in 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, “*There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*” And there's the key...whatever we receive from God isn't just for us, it's ***for the common good!*** God created every person with gifts, abilities, and talents to engage a variety of jobs, services, and activities. Sin leads us to use them selfishly,

but grace makes us generous. It assures us that our Source of provision will never run dry. In 1 Corinthians 12, the Apostle Paul urged us not to be ignorant about spiritual gifts and explained that natural abilities become spiritual abilities when we submit them to *the Lordship (authority) of Jesus for the common good*. Natural abilities turn into spiritual abilities exactly how natural people transform into spiritual people--by the powerful indwelling Spirit. One example is how God wired me to connect and network. When I was young, I used my abilities “*naturally*” to serve me. Over time, a growing love for *Jesus as Lord* and His church as family drives me to let my abilities be “*supernatural*” *gifts* to others. Commitment to one local church focuses me so I don’t wear out trying to save the world, and it teaches me how my *gifts* complement and can be sharpened by others. This leads to a third question...

Which Christians get the gifts? The short answer...WE ALL DO! Recall what we learned in 1 Corinthians 12 about how Christ’s body functions best when every part participates. Sometimes the way churches are structured makes it seem like only leaders are *gifted*, but let’s read what *Ephesians 4:11-15* says about that: *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*. This extremely long sentence blends 3 unlikely images: *babies*, a boat being *tossed about on a stormy sea*, and *cunningly deceptive* tricksters. The point is that Jesus *gifts* churches with leaders to graze, guide, and guard His people to avoid mission creep. There’s no shortage of people back then and in modern times who will pressure you into their “*thing*” which can distract you from the main thing--an all in commitment to Christ’s global and historic mission!

Recently, a few of our leaders implored us to use our *gifts* alongside them to help serve and build up our church body. It was obvious that some of them are super overloaded, and while we thank those who stepped up to help, to the rest I ask: “Do

you care about our overloaded members, and if so, what might need to be deprioritized so you can prioritize being one body in Christ?” Frankly, it’s time to stop dating the world, and start crushing on Christ’s body. Not that it’s not all about serving the church--it’s about becoming better local and global citizens! Regular attenders realize that we’re about collaborating with Christ’s global body, not just our local body. That’s why Krista brings in nonprofit leaders, it’s why we collect for the mercyworks triple match which happens again on December 13, and it’s why Wrapping Clermont Together was created to build collaboration. Bigger picture initiatives remind us to be good stewards of our resources--to redirect our time, talents, and treasures from natural uses to spiritual uses that serve ***the common good*** where we live, learn, work and play (cf. 1 Corinthians 4). On that note, I wonder, “What do your bank account and calendar reveal about what you love and live for?”

In closing, I’ll be blunt...it takes money to do ministry. The current economy has been draining our church bank account like it has yours. The past few years have challenged our church family--some of our people took jobs in other cities, fixed expenses have become unfixed, our benevolence fund is draining quicker than we can fill it, our 5-year-old HVAC units have devoured all of our maintenance budget plus \$3000, and we’re on track to take in \$30,000 less than last year. Anyway, we’ll gladly share details with interested members but suffice it to say, our budget could use a few generous year-end ***gifts***. We’re trying to keep expenses low and make the most of what we have, but we also need every member to give consistently and according to your ability. By the way, if you own a business or receive dividends from a retirement account, the IRS gives you better deductions than the rest of us, and we can tell you how that works! Remember, our ***ONE*** mission as a new humanity in Christ requires us to use our time, talents, and treasures ***to build up His body***, so a watching world will see our love for one another and be attracted to our Savior. That’s our **BIG IDEA: Grace gifts turn us into responsible humans**. And don’t forget...wherever you are on your journey of trusting Christ, you need not work through anything alone. Reach out and let us help!

Takeaways to discuss with your people (in addition to the underlined questions above!):

1. Living worthy of the call also requires eagerness (zealousness) to keep the unity of the Spirit. In what ways are we ALL being asked to value, be attentive to, and invest energy in unity so that it is not threatened?
2. Using verses 16-32, discuss how New Testament ethical texts address sins that disrupt community and virtues that promote community?
3. Professor Preben Vang (p. 171) wrote that “The gifts of the Spirit authenticate the gospel by doing things people could do only when reconciled to God.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. There’s a difference between doing stuff and doing stuff well. Which best describes you? What are some things you should probably stop doing so you can become a more focused believer?
5. We can be one in Christ without agreeing on everything. A famous quote from church history puts it like this: “*In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity.*” Read this [article link](#) and get with your people to ponder ways we can *care* for one another as we deal with differences. For extra fun, read [the Apostle’s Creed](#) and [the Nicene Creed](#) then discuss ways these historic creeds help us discern the difference between essentials and nonessentials.
6. Ephesians 4:11-15 clarifies that the Holy Spirit is not anti-leadership, anti-institution, or anti-preparation. What does this text say about the role of those with leadership gifts, and how does it negate the concept of a clergy-laity hierarchy? You could also discuss whether these are the only leadership gifts or if others appear in different lists.
7. How does 1 Peter 5:1-11 complement Ephesians 4:1-16 while providing more info about pastors and people working together? What does it say about the attitudes of both?
8. How can having a plurality of church leaders keep churches from overemphasizing one aspect of the church’s work such as evangelism, missions, etc.? Why is that important?

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Context:** “The prayer and doxology at the end of chapter 3 signals the end of the theoretical section of the Ephesian letter. Chapters 4–6 turn to practical matters. In chapters 1–3 the author has described God’s work in Christ of unifying Jew and Gentile, heaven and earth. The assumption behind chapters 4–6 is that the lives of persons living that reality will reflect it. Like Paul’s, the writer’s understanding of morality is theological. The parenetic material, like Christian unity itself, grows from life ‘in Christ.’ The instructions preceding the household code (5:21–6:9) are difficult to divide into units. The long section 4:1–5:20 is a sustained exhortation contrasting the life in Christ with the old life of ‘futility’ (4:17). Throughout, Christ is the ‘measure,’ (4:13), the example and standard of conduct (see 4:13, 15, 20, 21; 5:2, 8, 17, 20). C. H. Dodd suggests the following division on thematic grounds: 4:1–16, promoting the church’s unity; 4:17–5:20, breaking with pagan ways; 5:21–

6:9, building Christian homes; 6:10–20, putting on the armor of God. The commentary that follows employs Dodd’s divisions and further refines the progression of thought within those units.” (Bowman, 122)

- **One Lord:** “While the world may know numerous ‘lords’ (1 Cor. 8:5–6), Christians know only one, and this implies that the one Lord is not going to give contradictory commands to his followers...An even greater basis for unity exists in God, the ‘Father of all’ (v. 6). The theology is close to that in 3:14–15. Surely the Jewish Shema—the confession that Yahweh is one (Deut. 6:4)—lies behind this verse (cf. also Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6).” (Snodgrass, 199)
- **Another kind of unity:** “Christian theology offers a strong basis for relations with other human beings purely because they are people created in the image of God. But relations among Christians have a broader foundation. They share an identity in Christ, the experience of Christ, and values determined by Christ. This is what Paul attempts to convey with his focus on unity and on the body. Most of the vices in the New Testament ethical instruction are sins that disrupt community, and most of the virtues promote community...The ego is the main problem in relations, for therein lies the origin of feelings of inferiority and arrogance, of envy and greed, of prejudice and defensiveness, and of intolerance and abuse.” (Snodgrass, 209)
- **Spiritual gifts:** “To say a gift is something given at conversion and is different from a talent is wrong. The parallelism in 1 Corinthians 12:4–7 shows that a gift is the same thing as a working or a service; a gift is merely the way the Spirit works through a person for the good of the community. Consequently, no one should assume a gift is a lifelong possession. In Ephesians 4:11 certain leaders are viewed as gifts to the church, but actually this is true of all Christians. All have received grace and have a responsibility to build up the church. As the Spirit works through each person for the good of the community, each person is a gift to the church. We would do well to have less concern about identifying gifts and more concern about being a gift, that is, about how the Spirit functions through us to strengthen the body.” (Snodgrass, 213)
- **Gifts are like God’s fingerprints:** “In the same way, the gifts of the Spirit are like God’s fingerprints in a congregation...his way of authenticating his involvement...(we) can give a good talk, but only the Spirit can use that talk (for kingdom purposes). When the Spirit does this, we can look back and say that it was a gift of preaching being exercised, not just savvy oratory. Why? Because God’s fingerprints were left behind, leaving a mark unlike any a human can create.” (Vang, 171)
- **Gifts are not so fixed or technical:** “Paul’s use of the term charisma elsewhere (e.g., for celibacy and marriage in 7:7), like his use of a variety of terms for spiritual gifts in 12:1–6, suggests that the concept is not as fixed or technical an expression as some have made it out to be. The range of functions covered by Paul’s various lists of gifts makes it likely that any combination of talents, abilities, and endowments, however suddenly given or leisurely cultivated, may qualify as spiritual gifts, if a believer uses them for God’s glory and his work in the world. Certainly, Paul’s own unique preparation for

Christian ministry as a Hellenistic Jew and Roman citizen makes it difficult to believe that he would have viewed all of his spiritual gifts, including preaching and teaching (Acts 13:1), as acquired only after his conversion. But precisely because all of the gifts have non-Christian analogues, a talent or ability becomes a charisma only when it is used by a believer for the ‘common good’ (v. 7). In general, there is little to commend either the approach that restricts a particular gift to a uniquely supernatural manifestation or the approach that leaves a gift virtually indistinguishable from a natural talent.” (Blomberg, 248-249)

- **Religion:** “The word ‘religion,’ we should remember, is derived from the root for the word “ligaments” and refers to that which binds together. Unity and efforts to assist each other are necessary conclusions.” (Snodgrass, 215)

Thoughts on verses 8-10

- As in some other passages in his letters, Paul is about to give a list of the various gifts that Jesus has given to his church. But before he does so he slips into almost poetic and reflective mode, quoting a well-known psalm (68:18) and explaining it, to create a biblical setting for what is to come. The gifts that Jesus gives are part of the great story of what he has achieved. The problem for us, reading this, is that the psalm in question, which talks of ‘going up on high’ and so on, seems difficult to understand. What is it about? A first-century Jew might have understood this verse from the psalm to be speaking of Moses. After the Exodus, when the Egyptians were defeated and the Israelites rescued from slavery, Moses went up Mount Sinai and came down with the stone tablets of the law, the Torah. In line with several early Christian writings, Paul sees the ascension of Jesus as being in a sense like that of Moses. After the ‘new Exodus’ which had been achieved in his death and resurrection, setting the human race free from bondage to sin and death, Jesus ‘went up’ into the heavenly realm where he now reigns as Lord. Instead of coming down again with the law, as Moses had done, Jesus ‘returned’ in the person of the spirit, through whom different gifts are now showered on the church. Why then does Paul say that the king ‘went up’ and ‘came down’ like this? Verse 9 is one of the most puzzling in the whole letter, but it is probably meant simply to stress that, in the gift of the spirit, it is Christ himself who is received (see 3:17; and, e.g., Romans 8:9–11). This is how King Jesus makes the church into his own ‘fullness’ (1:23), giving us his own presence by the spirit.” (Wright, 44-45)
- “The mention of ascension in verse 8a motivates a parenthetical comment in the next two verses. Interpretation of these verses has been made difficult by the church tradition that has understood them of a descent into Hades. At issue is how one should understand the genitive ‘of the earth’ (in the lit. translation, ‘He descended into the lower regions of the earth’). Does this mean ‘the regions under the earth’ or ‘the lower regions, that is, the earth’? If the former, then a descent to Hades is the intent; if the latter three views are possible: (1) Christ’s incarnation, (2) Christ’s descent in the Spirit at Pentecost, (3) Christ’s descent to the church alluded to in 2:17. The last view has little to commend

it, and a descent to Hades is difficult to accept for this text or for any other. Paul nowhere else speaks of a descent into Hades, and it is doubtful whether 1 Peter 3:18–22 refers to such an idea either. In Ephesians the conflict with the powers takes place in the heavenly realms, and Christ’s victory is by exaltation, not descent (see 1:20–23; 6:10). The main focus with this theme is on the movement from heaven to earth, that is, on the Incarnation (see John 1:51; 3:13; 6:51). The other two views of verses 9–10 (the Incarnation or Pentecost) both assume the words should be translated, ‘He descended to the earth below.’ While a reference to Pentecost fits the logic of the passage, it is difficult to accept, for this would surely be an enigmatic way for Paul to express it. Most likely, he is referring to the Incarnation: The one who descended in the Incarnation is the same one who has ascended and is now exalted over all things. The apostle’s real concern in this parenthesis is not the descent motif, but the ascent. (Snodgrass, 201–202)

Considerations for discussion leaders:

1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Single underlined sentences are for discussion, while key points are double underlined.
3. Keep the discussion around 30 mins. Once you hit the “sweet spot”, spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us for help obtaining other resources.

Bibliography (Note: Our use of these materials does not imply full agreement with them)

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