

Stand Alone Message

E Pluribus Unum

Intro: It is not uncommon for local churches to be perceived as appealing to people of a certain a niche. Maybe this church is known as the “traditional church that values truth and conveys reverence.” Maybe that church is known as the “relevant church that makes the ‘un-churched’ and the ‘de-churched’ feel welcome.” Or maybe another church is known as the “caring church that makes a difference for good in their community.” Individuals can often be drawn to churches that champion causes that interest them, and the inevitable result of such market-driven Christianity is (at the very least) segregation and stifled growth. God has gifted individuals with varying gifts from others, and the local church is to be a Mosaic – not a blank wall.

1 Corinthians 12:4-26

The American motto isn't an American original

On July 4, 1776 a committee was commissioned to design a seal for the United States of America. That seal would emblazon the essence of what it means to be the United States of America. Among other things, the final version of the seal included a short Latin phrase, “E Pluribus Unum.” The phrase does seem to capture something that is essential to the American spirit and vision. “Out of many, one.” Many nationalities, many states, and many individuals collectively hailed their allegiance to the democratic republic of the United States of America.

The use of this phrase is not, however, unique to the American vision. In fact, Augustine (the 4th century AD Christian philosopher and theologian) used the Latin phrase to speak of the kind of significant fellowship that only true friends can enjoy. And even before Augustine, the Apostle Paul spoke of unity and diversity in the context of Christian community. Many may indeed become one, but only in the Gospel can we truly see this beautiful Mosaic take on supernatural form.

Message Outline:

- (1) What kind of gifts has God given the local church?
- (2) Do we tend to emphasize some kinds gifts over others?
- (3) What usually happens to our posture towards those with differing gifts?
- (4) Local church is where we find true unity and diversity.

Exposition:

1. What kind of gifts has God given the local church?

A. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4

i. Apostles

1. These were specially gifted and commissioned men who received their title and task from the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

ii. Prophecy/Prophets

1. This is not only the prophetic voice of those through whom God has spoken at various times and various ways (Heb. 1:1), but also the powerful *forth telling* of godly truth and wisdom from the Scriptures.

iii. Ministry/Service

1. The gift of service or ministry is often associated with the office of deacon, since this is what a deacon does in the context of the local church. However, any Christian can be gifted in this way.

iv. Teachers/Teaching¹

1. Both those who teach and the ability to do so are gifts from God. The ability to teach is granted to Christians who are in turn given to the local church body as a gift for godly instruction.
2. This gift may be given to any Christian, but it is an essential gift to those who pastor (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1).

v. Evangelists/Missionaries

1. All Christians are evangelists in the sense that all have been commissioned by Christ to be witnesses in the world (2 Cor. 5:17-21). However, this gift seems to point to the special gift of the Holy Spirit whereby some Christians are specially equipped to engage strangers and aliens with the Gospel.

vi. Exhortation and Discernment

1. These two are distinguished from one another, but they are related. On the one hand, discernment is that gift of some that enables them to see through the surface of an issue and get to

¹ Ephesians 4:11 is the only place in the Scriptures where “pastor” is used as a *noun*. Everywhere else it is a *verb*; i.e. *doing the work of “pastoring” or “shepherding.”* Here it is used in such a way as to attach it directly to another noun, “teacher.” It is likely that the modern understanding of “pastor” should not be understood primarily as a *pastorally gifted person*, but rather as *one who serves in the role of “pastoring”* (verb) with the use of various gifts (“teaching” or “able to teach” being an essential item on the list of pastoral gifts).

the root of it. On the other hand, exhortation is the gift that empowers some to speak with appeal to those who may be in error.

vii. Ruling/Governing/Leading

1. Some Christians are gifted by God with the ability to lead and govern others well. This too is a gift that is often combined with other gifts in any one person and employed for the benefit of the local church body.

viii. Giving

1. This gift may refer only to desire, but it likely also includes ability. Therefore, God not only gifts the local church with generous givers, but also with capable ones.

ix. Mercy and Helping

1. These two again are distinct from each other, but they are also complementary. Mercy refers to a disposition of the heart, and helping refers to a readiness of the hands. We see both at work in those who act with a merciful heart towards others in need.

x. Faith

1. The “gift of faith” likely refers to an extraordinary confidence or trust in God in the midst of adverse circumstance.²

xi. Words of wisdom and knowledge, healing, tongues, and miracles

1. These gifts are often referred to as the “sign” gifts.³

B. These Gifts might be categorized in the following ways:

- i. Gifts that specially equip some believers to *Proclaim the Gospel*
- ii. Gifts that specially equip some believers to *Guard the Gospel*
- iii. Gifts that specially equip some believers to *Live out the implications of the Gospel*

² First, we know faith is a gift from God to all believers (Eph. 2:8-9). Second, *Pistis*, the same Greek word translated here, is used in Gal. 5:22 with reference to the “fruit of the Spirit,” and there it is translated “faithfulness.” Therefore, we know that the gift of “faith” here (1 Cor. 12:9) neither refers to belief in the Gospel, nor faithfulness to Christ, since both of these are necessarily possessed of all Christians.

³ Sign gifts are those gifts that were in operation during the time when the Gospel initially spread from Jerusalem. The Apostles carried divine authority to preach the Gospel and correct error. Signs accompanied authoritative messengers to confirm or validate their message. Once the Apostles died, and the written Word of God was the completed form of special revelation, then the sign gifts faded away (some more quickly than others).

- C. Colin Hansen labels the kinds of people that might tend toward one of these categories more strongly than the others as *Commissioned*, *Courageous*, or *Compassionate*⁴
- i. Commissioned people tend to resourcefully reach toward new people with the Gospel of Christ. Like Jesus, they sometimes startle religious establishments with their zeal to break barriers that block access to God. These folks are often quite interested in making Christianity practical to unbelievers, so they will see that the Gospel is a matter of urgent concern.
 - ii. Courageous people tend to exhibit steadfast faith that is not blown off course by the culture's winds. Like Jesus, courageous people boldly stand up and speak out for biblical truth, even when it's not popular. These folks study their Bible, church history, and theology so that they can know and defend the teaching of Christ.
 - iii. Compassionate people tend to show generosity with their time, talent, and treasures. Like Jesus, they empathize with those on the margins and the outcasts. Perhaps they themselves have been hurt or discarded, even by authority figures that should have been safe and good. Compassionate people can often relate to others who suffer.

2. Do we tend to emphasize some kinds gifts over others?

- A. It appears that this was what the whole rebuke/teaching of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is about.
- B. The Church of Corinth was a divisive church
 - i. They divided over "celebrity" leaders/teachers.
 1. Paul wrote, "10 I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you... 11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. 12 What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 1:10-12).
 - ii. They divided over authority.

⁴ These descriptions of *Courageous*, *Compassionate*, and *Commissioned* Christians are taken (with slight modifications throughout) from Collin Hansen's book "Blind Spots." The book information is noted on direct quotations elsewhere.

1. Paul said that there were some who were “arrogant” and striving for power among the Corinthian Christians (1 Cor 4:18-21). There were also many who rejected the clear Apostolic command, and welcomed unrepentant sin in the church (1 Cor. 5).
- iii. They divided over social and economic class.
 1. Those with less resource and prestige would not get any bread at the Lord’s Supper, and the rich would gorge themselves and get drunk (1 Cor. 11:17-34).
 - iv. They divided over gifting.
 1. Paul explains (1) that God is the giver of gifts – no one else deserves credit or praise for them, and (2) God gives gifts for the benefit of the local body – not the individual (1 Cor. 12-14).
- C. It does seem that measuring my strengths against others’ weaknesses is a tendency we all have.
- i. Hansen – *“If you’re commissioned to reach the lost for Jesus; you look up to the creatives, the influencers, the entrepreneurial leaders who leverage new measures for greater results. If you’re courageous you celebrate the lone warrior, bloody but unbowed by popular sentiment. If you’re compassionate you cheer the prophet who dares speak truth to oppressive authority on behalf of the wounded.”*⁵
 1. It is not bad to celebrate those things that really get your motor running, but it is not beneficial when we criticize others for not feeling the same excitement over the same things.

3. What usually happens to our posture towards those with differing gifts?

- A. We tend to devalue the gifts of others when they are not closely aligned with our own.
 - i. If you are Commissioned, your passion to share the Gospel in this generation can make you impatient with others, especially those who are older or more conservative than you are. You may also find that your urgency in the moment makes you vulnerable to losing touch with your Christian heritage and (worse) Gospel distortions.
 - ii. If you are Courageous, you may come across as combative to those who disagree with you, and they will often simply tune you out. Pride

⁵ Hansen, Collin (2015-04-16). Blind Spots: Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate, and Commissioned Church (Cultural Renewal) (pp. 34-35). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

may sometimes prevent you from caring more about another person than you do about being right, and this may keep you from being a great resource to Christians who lack your experience and education.

- iii. If you are Compassionate, you may find yourself becoming frustrated or even angry with other Christians who “just don’t get it.” While your attitude towards fellow Christians might lack grace, you may also be tempted to compromise on biblical truth for the sake of meeting temporal needs. It will always be easier to help your neighbor fill his belly or her gas tank than it will be to speak to them about the condition of their soul.

4. Local church is where we find unity and diversity.

- A. Gospel-centered Community – we must unite around the Gospel!
- B. Gospel-centered Community – we must embrace our diversity!
 - i. Hansen – “God created us in splendid diversity of thought, experience, and personality. And when these differences cohere around the gospel of Jesus Christ, they work together to challenge, comfort, and compel a needy world with the only love that will never fail or fade.”⁶

Application

- What is God commanding us to BELIEVE here?
 - The Gospel is the singularly uniting bond for humans
 - God gifted individuals distinctly for His intended purposes
 - God intends to use distinct individuals as a singular body in the local church
- What is God commanding us to DO here?
 - Believe the Gospel – really believe it!
 - Thank God for His gifts
 - Neither envy those whose gifts you want, nor despise those whose gifts are different

⁶ Hansen, Collin (2015-04-16). *Blind Spots: Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate, and Commissioned Church (Cultural Renewal)* (p. 24). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

My Prayers

- May God make us a grateful people for enjoying the good gifts He has given us
- May God forgive us for taking our gifts for granted
- May God forgive us for despising others whose gifts are different from our own
- May God make us an effective church body, and help us to use our gifts for His glory and our joy