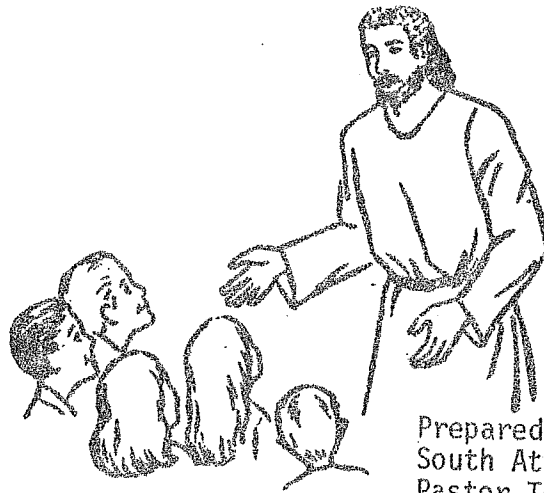


TEACHING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Part II

Practical application of the Biblical teaching
about the "Body of Christ" for the classroom



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PREFACE

"To each single one of you there has been given a grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Ephesians 4:7). With these words Paul was telling the Ephesians, and is telling us today, that each member of the *Una Sancta* has received some endowment to serve the church. The context of verses 8-13 shows that the word "grace" used here does not refer to saving grace, that is, forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. Saving grace is alike for all, but here Paul speaks of "a grace" which is different for each believer. Each has received an endowment "according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Christ himself received "all things," "all power," as a gift to His human nature; and in accord with the vast measure of these gifts to Him, He dispenses to every single one of us the grace or gift we are to use.

The intent of this presentation is two-fold:

- 1) to renew for each of us as pastors and teachers an awareness of this Biblical teaching; and
- 2) to generate suggestions and ideas for the practical application of this Biblical teaching in our daily work.

The presentation that follows presupposes on the part of the reader a proper understanding of Scriptural teachings of sanctification, especially in its narrow sense, and of good works.

I. The Problem

Reagan to go it alone

What a startling headline. The article that follows it explains that all cabinet posts will be abolished because the President has decided no one can do each of the jobs as well as he can. To save the taxpayers' money, the article further explains, the entire White House staff has been dismissed. The President will even pilot Air Force One himself!

Ridiculous? Impossible? Yet how often don't we place ourselves in this very position? Pastor, why are you sitting there trying to type out that wedding service folder? Why are you pushing that lawn mower around the church grounds? Why are you laboring countless hours setting up this year's stewardship program? Teacher, why are you fretting about getting your Thanksgiving bulletin board down and your Lenten one up? Why are you spending countless hours correcting papers? Is there no one else who has the ability to collect lunch money? Principal, why are you counting all those nickels and quarters from the mission collection? Why are you typing that note to the parents? Is there no one else to shovel the snow before school starts?

Are we by our actions teaching our people, adults and children, that church work can only be done by called workers? All too often this may be the case. We become so busy with our ministry that we tend to forget that our fellow believers also have a ministry, a ministry to carry on the work of the Gospel. And to do that God has given to each, undeserved gifts.

"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (I Cor. 10:31)
In simplistic terms this passage identifies the gifts each believer is to use as a member of the Holy Christian Church. The term "whatever" takes in

many actions, many abilities, and every use of the body. The gifts we have to work with are a multitude. Our Savior has not been stingy in His distribution of gifts. Some individuals definitely have received more than others, but all have received many. Any talent, any ability should be considered as one of His gifts to be used in turn "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

The children who have been entrusted to our care are also part of the Holy Christian Church. They also have received "a grace" to be used in the service of the kingdom. Perhaps if we take time to train them in the use of their gifts now, they will be willing, ready, and able to put those same gifts to use as adult members of the congregation.

For the most part we have little difficulty in identifying many of the gifts our children have. Some latent or hidden talents may take a little more work to find, but sooner or later we generally do become aware of them. Most frequently we probably give little thought to actual instruction of our children concerning the use of their gifts. Probably the greater share of such instruction is to be found in the presentation of Biblical characters and Biblical events; e.g. David and Jonathan in relationship to the Eighth Commandment, the lad with five loaves and two small fish. The follow-up application is generally paraphrased in a "Go and do thou likewise" comment.

Thus the problem before us is three-fold:

1. The identification of the gifts each child has
2. Instruction in the use of the gifts each child has
3. A meaningful application of those gifts as a work of service

II. Identification

To identify the gifts which have been given to our children is no doubt

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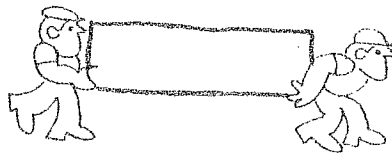
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the easiest part of our problem. As we shall see shortly, few if any of us will have difficulty picking out areas of talent among our charges. In many cases the student himself/herself is also aware of a special ability or talent. But let us not ignore or fail to search for the gifts which may be so obvious. As we become aware of these gifts we must also aid the child in being able to identify his or her own gifts.

Bible history and Catechism lessons certainly afford ample opportunity to identify various gifts God gave to common ordinary men and women. Many of these are well-known and the gifts are obvious, but do we take the time to emphasize to our children that Moses, Samson, David, and Elijah were nothing without His gifts? Since most of us are not Samson's or David's, let us not forget those "little" gifts God has given to each of us. Aaron may have played "second fiddle" to brother Moses, but it was his gift of speaking which God used; unknown Hur used his muscles to hold up the prophets hands; the unnamed centurion of Capernaum used his position and finances in behalf of the Jews. What were the gifts used by such unknowns as Eliashib (Nehemiah 3), Elihu (Job 32), or Jethro (Exodus 15)?

We pause now to look briefly at several slides and together attempt to identify the obvious and hidden talents and gifts portrayed.



I am certain each of us could continue the list of examples *ad infinitum* but this small sampling will serve our purpose here. We do see, we do recognize quite readily the gifts found in our children. However, if we are to instruct in the area of ministering with their gifts, both we and they must

be consciously aware of them and, more importantly, Who the Giver of those gifts is.

III. Instruction

And that brings us to the second part of our problem - instruction. Instruction should include three basic areas. First there must be a knowledge of the Giver and an appreciation of these gifts. Secondly, there must be an understanding of ones position and membership in the *Una Sancta*. Thirdly, there must be instruction in the use of, or the ministering of, those gifts.

Again, Bible examples and Catechism lessons offer many opportunities to show the gifts our gracious and loving Father has bestowed upon mankind. And, I'm sure we do this in our lesson presentations and applications. Certainly we can point to the life of Moses, for example, and note that on his own he met with little success. It was only when Jehoyah called him, directed him, and blessed him that he was able to lead Israel successfully. Some of the gifts and abilities Moses received were exceptional and through the Giver's power even miraculous things were done. Do we become guilty of placing emphasis on the great happening at the Red Sea or on what "Moses did," at the expense of acknowledging the real Deliverer? Care must be taken that we do not exalt and glorify the gift or the receiver. We must acknowledge with James that "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." Certainly Moses acknowledged this at the end of his farewell address. "(The Lord) is your shield and helper and your glorious sword." (Deut. 33:29) We should have no trouble finding examples of David's appreciation for the mightyworks of the Lord. "Praise the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all His benefits." (Psalm 103:2) Other "classic" examples that come to mind are Joseph, Solomon, and Paul. The First Article

and the Fourth Petition also give us opportunity to present the great Giver of all gifts and to lead our children "to appreciate and to receive with thanksgiving" their gifts.

Secondly in our instruction, as we talk about God's gifts we must constantly remember who we are - redeemed children of God, members of the Holy Christian Church. And likewise, those whom we instruct. They must also be made aware that they are branches who, by God's grace, live and move and have their being because they spring from the eternal Vine. Each does not act or react without having an effect on the whole body.

Paul's analogy of the human body and the Church in Ephesians 4 is not an isolated case. In several other instances he uses the same picture and in some cases in even more detail. "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ." (I Corinthians 12:12) He follows this statement in the rest of the chapter with a rather detailed explanation. What a beautiful picture he paints! The eye isn't the whole body, nor the ear, nor the nose. God arranged the many parts into one body just as He wanted them.

In various grade levels we study the human anatomy, its functions, and interrelationships. Why not follow Paul's example and latch on to those built in opportunities to teach about the "body of Christ"? The possibilities are countless! What good is your stomach without the intestines? Every part, great or small in our estimation, is important to the function and well-being of the whole body. Maybe Eliashib was only a "little toe", but without him many would not have walked through the Sheep Gate!

In using our Biblical examples we will point out that God's people used their gifts out of love for Him. And so it should be for every child of God. With a thankful heart each member of the body will want to use his gifts to serve the Giver. This, of course, is not a natural reaction of man. Here

must come the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. The third use of the Law and leading a sanctified life of good works must be clearly instilled in our children. The motivation of loving Him who first loved us should be the key in teaching His lambs to use their gifts.

A third part of our instruction will include the "how to" of using the gifts we have received. The gifts Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4 and elsewhere (Romans 12:1-9) are to be used for "works of service." So frequently the idea prevails that this refers only to the church and the work of the church. To use our gifts in special labors of love directly connected to or involving the church is fine and commendable. But let us not limit our works of service to just this specific area. Paul again clarified the matter and sets us straight: "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." (Gal. 6:10)

The entire life of a Christian is to be one of service to his King. The I Corinthians and Galatians passages quoted earlier and others, clearly attests to that. The Christian's life and deeds cannot be separated from his Lord and His Church. Doing dishes in the church kitchen and doing dishes at home should be no different. If one has the ability to mow lawn at church, he or she should have that same ability at home, and vice versa. How then should we minister with our gifts? Gladly! Willingly! Out of love for a Savior who ministered to us.

Up to this point it has been implied that, in identifying and especially in instructing our children concerning the gifts they have, we do this in a classroom atmosphere. And certainly we must do much of our teaching there. But there are other places and times to do exactly the same thing and perhaps with more impact. That young boy in your class that you think might make a preacher some day - when was the last time you talked to him on a one-to-one

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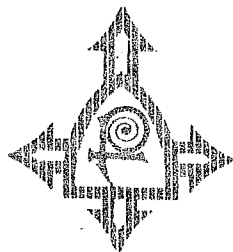
basis? Yes, if we only could, or would, find opportunities to speak with our children individually about their gifts, we would probably find greater results; especially if that conversation is more of an informal approach outside of the classroom or office.

By working on an individual basis you will have made your classroom presentation more meaningful to the child. You will be impressing upon the child his worth as an individual and his value as a member of the body of Christ much more so than you could expect to do when that child is only one in a whole crowd. Note the example of the Master with the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus, Matthew, and others.

IV. Application

The best of instruction and the best of head knowledge is not sufficient. Unless there is a meaningful application of that knowledge the instruction and the knowledge is worthless. So our task is not yet complete and our instruction must continue. When and where to apply those gifts is also important. We might simply say at all times and in all places. But realistically we know it will take more than just saying it. Especially when our children are young and just maturing, both physically and spiritually, we may need to guide them in this important aspect of their lives, offering ideas and suggestions. And more importantly we guide them by leading and showing the way through our own example. This takes practice and effort on our part and must be done with care as there are two major pitfalls along the way. The one is legalism; the other was referred to at the beginning of this paper. You can't do it alone either!

We now go back to our slides. Let us see what practical applications can be made of the gifts we identified earlier.

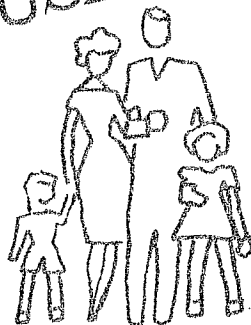


SHARE

It might be well to mention a word of caution. We could do much harm if we try to obtain a work of service where the gift has not been given. (This is especially true in the assignment of certain conference papers!!)

Those who receive should in turn be willing and happy to give. And so the Lord expects, as we learn from the parable of the unjust steward and from the parable of the talents. Let each use his gift to the greatest of his ability as Paul encourages. "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:4-8). And finally "Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work." (II Corinthians 9:6-8)

LORD,
USE ME



<u>SLIDE</u>	<u>IDENTIFIED GIFT</u>	<u>APPLICATION</u>
1	<i>music</i>	
2		
3	<i>muscles</i>	
4	<i>math</i>	
5	<i>read</i>	
6	<i>mobility</i>	
7	<i>conversation musical</i>	
8	<i>leadership</i>	
9	<i>art</i>	
10	<i>personality</i>	