***Illustrations of the Church - PH09-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:1***

It is our purpose in this session to instruct you in the Word of God. If you are here for that reason, we trust that your expectations will be fulfilled. There are many people who deeply resent this, and you don't know the repercussions that we get because of the teaching of the Word of God. Satan is churning up all of hell in his furor against what is moving out of this work. Basically, we are treating you as the people of God who are capable of knowing the Word of God. So we have many people who are unsympathetic to this ministry. They are striking at this work with such attacks as: "Our church services are just big classrooms. All you do is treat us like we were college students." So, I take it that they wish that we would treat you as if you are incapable of entering into what God has for you. But we're not going to treat you like that. We're going to treat you as people who are capable by the grace system of entering into the fullness of the Word of God.

Another acute attack we have is: "You are squelching our emotions." Well, you can hardly sit here and hear the Marine Corps hymn played and have your emotions squelched as the Berean band sounds off. We want you to be just as happy and emotional as you can be. However, we want the Lord, the Holy Spirit, to be picking that up with you from His Word, and He will, and then it is right. I'm trying to remind you that we have many people who are not our friends. The antagonism, I'll tell you, basically comes back to the Word of God, and to the authority structure within God's local assembly.

However, we are not alone. We are in a rising tide. We happen to be the forefront, but we are on a rising tide of churches and people who are just fed up with what has been cranked out in churches with the clichés and the mouthing of senseless little words, and people are realizing that God has something for them. We're trying to get it to you. So we hope that you will understand that God does not guide us as if we were dumb animals. He guides us as those who can understand Him. The reason He guides you in a unique way is because you are a member of the body of Christ. You happen to live in the most magnificent age of all the dispensations. You live in the age of grace. In this age, we have been learning about the unique body that God has called out from Jews and gentiles, and you happen to be part of it--intimately related to Jesus Christ for all eternity as no other saints in ages past or ages future ever will or have been.

**Characteristics of the Church Age**

There are certain characteristics of the church age that we mentioned. In this age, and in this age alone:

1. Every believer is in **union** with Christ.
2. Every believer is indwelt by **Jesus Christ** for fellowship.
3. Every believer is indwelt by **the Holy Spirit** for power.
4. Every believer is his own **priest**. You represent yourself before God. What you do is your own business as unto the Lord. Our business is to instruct you on how you should make those decisions to live your life as unto the Lord.
5. Every Christian is an **ambassador** for Jesus Christ. You have been called to service, and you should not badmouth the doing of Christian service. That is the whole name of the game--ambassadorship. An ambassadorship means your performance of a ministry commensurate with your spiritual gifts.
6. We have **a complete canon of Scripture** in this age which we have not had before.
7. Every Christian is called to **a supernatural way of life**.

**Illustrations of the Church**

Because this age is so distinct and unique from Israel, God has given us in the New Testament certain illustrations (comparisons) to try to help us understand what the Lord has done for us:

1. One of those, first of all, is that Christ is the **shepherd**, and Christians are His **sheep**.
2. Another relationship is that Christ is the **vine**, and Christians are the **branches**. His life flows through us.
3. A third illustration was that Christ is the chief **cornerstone**, and Christians are the **building** which He is putting together--the church.
4. We looked at the illustration that Christ is the **high priest**, and the church age believers are **a kingdom of priests**.
5. **The Body of Christ**

We begin this session by looking at a fifth illustration, and that is that Christ is the head of the church which is His body. Ephesians 4:11-16 describe this relationship, and we have gone into those versus in some detail. In the next session, as we begin looking at the local church itself in its operation; its structure; and, its organizational aspect, we will be touching upon this passage a little more.

Israel was an organization. It was a theocratic nation. It was a nation ruled by God (Ephesians 2:12). The visible church today (the local church), is also an organization. It has a structure. It has lines of authority. It has somebody who is in charge. It has ways that the stockholders in the coronation put people in charge and recognize those who have these responsibilities to carry. However, the church is also an invisible living organism which partakes of the life of its head, Jesus Christ.

The church is different from Israel. Israel was just an organization, whereas the church is a living body as well as an organization. This church is a self-developing body which is what Ephesians 4:11-16 describes for us. Christians have a service to perform in building this body of Christ, and they do this through instructing people in the Word. It is you who tell people about salvation. It is you who tell people how they may develop spiritual maturity in their lives. I have known Christians who, because they have been confused about their relationship to Jesus Christ as members of His body, and who have a part to perform in that body, would talk to somebody in the wrong way. I knew of man one time who was talking to a man about salvation. The man was inquiring, "How do I get saved?" The man said, "Come to church with me next Sunday, and my pastor will tell you how you can be saved."

This is the kind of misconception we're dealing with. You are a member of the body of Christ. You are a member because you were supposed to be doing something in that body. You are performing a service through a gift that you have been given. The service that you perform, basically (in short), is telling people how to get to heaven, and how to develop spiritual maturity through the Word of God that you yourself have entered into and that you have learned. The Christian is equipped to do this by the pastor-teacher who explains doctrine, and who leads in the local church organization and ministry. It is not just techniques. It is not just devices. It is on the basis of what people have known.

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in Volume 4 of his theology, has a little short statement that I think sums it up very well. Dr. Shafer says, "According to this passage (that is, Ephesians 4:11-12), the pastor-teacher is responsible for the equipment of those given into his care. Although this equipment does involve methods of work, it includes much more, namely an accurate knowledge of the truth."

We have become bogged down with Christian education methods, and with thinking that we are going to serve the Lord providing we know the right technique; the right method; and, the right way to get up before the congregation. So we are taught that when you stand up before a congregation, you must be sure that you are dressed in a certain way. You must be sure that your hair is combed just right. One Dallas Seminary student was criticized in a practice teaching technique recently because his hair was just a little too close to his right eyebrow. Also his tie was a little too gaudy. The instructor couldn't pay attention to his message because he was so impressed.

If you're impressed with the beauty of somebody's tie, you need to see a doctor, if it distracts you that much from the Word of God. We are told of all these little devices in order to get people into the work. We are told when you stand up there, you are to be an enthusiastic hotshot; praising the Lord; using the right terms; saying, "Oh, the Lord is really carrying on--the wonderful things He's doing are so nice;" and, get your mouth-full-of-teeth smile out there. Those are techniques. Like Dr. Chafer says, "That is not the thing that is important." He never was too keen on techniques, but he was very keen as he taught us in class on knowing the truth. He would say to us, "Young men, if you ever come to the time in your ministry when you do not have truth to preach, I will turn over in my grave," because that was the kind of a school that he designed.

On the other hand, this is not to suggest that we do not believe in Christian education, or that the techniques of Christian education, which are legitimate significance to the proper conduct of a class and the attention of people to concentrate on the Word, are not right. Or, that there aren't ways of presenting the Word that make it stick and that make it clear. We all use those all the time. However, it is not the vehicle that is the main thing. That's what I'm saying. That's what we often devolve into. It is the content of truth that is important. That's what's going to carry the ball. Even if you blunder and could have done it better as far as your approach and technique, you deliver the truth, and God's going to honor it, and there will be fruit and response from it. So you are equipped with the truth, first of all. Whatever good devices and procedures you may use in instructing the truth that you have learned, well and good. But don't depend on that.

A church member is appointed to a specific service as a member of the body of Christ. This is taught in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12:3-8. Just as every part of your human body has a specific function, so too does each Christian in the body of Christ. You know this principle if you've ever lost a fingernail. I lost a little fingernail one time, and I quickly realized how an insignificant thing like your little fingernail plays a very vital part, as you touch that sensitive place with that fingernail gone. It is a wild experience, and you can't wait for that fingernail to get back in there. You respect the little fingernail from then on. Every part in the human body, insignificant and unattractive as it may be, has a vital role. Like one college student said when somebody asked him if he had his tonsils taken out, "I don't get rid of anything that God gave me." Well, sometimes you have to have your tonsils taken out, or your appendix taken out, but even they, whether we know it or not, have a function and a role to play, and that's why they're in the body.

This is what the Word of God tries to convey to us--that the human body with its parts is a functioning unit. A believer's function in the body of Christ is determined by his spiritual gift which is sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit at the point of his salvation (1 Corinthians 12:11, 18). Some of you may still be tempted to think that you're not much around the Lord's work--that you're not much in the body of Christ. I'm here to tell you that you are wrong. You have at least one spiritual gift, and that spiritual gift is vital to every one of us. If you sit on dead center and do not exercise that gift, every one of us loses. You will bring problems into other people's lives. You will bring difficulties into other families because you have failed to exercise your spiritual gifts, or because you have copped out and deserted.

When God said, "I put you in here for the functioning of your gifts in this place," and you're floating off like a maverick someplace else, you'd better not take that lightly. If God has placed you in a local assembly, He placed you there because He expected you to be there. He expects you, from that place, to be functioning your gift within it, and outside of it, in your daily life. You have a gift with which to serve, and all of you are necessary in the body of Christ. You will all be equally rewarded, according to your exercising your spiritual gifts. There is no one here who is going to be such a hero in heaven that the Lord says, "You were really something special. I want to give you another extra amount of reward." That is not so. To the extent that you exercise your gift, you will be rewarded.

The learning of doctrine is learning how God operates. That's what it's all about. When we learn the Word and when we learn these principles, we learn how God operates. However, I must caution you not to pick up the mistaken notion that when you sit in church and learn the Word of God that you are serving the Lord. You are not serving God, and you will not be rewarded for sitting in church and learning the Word. This would be comparable to somebody who's in the military service, and while he's in boot camp in training, he's considered that he is performing military service for his country. He is not. All he is doing at that point is preparing. He is at a staging point getting ready to serve. When he has completed boot camp, he is ready to go out and serve.

I grant you that the illustration follows through that there is a time for preparation. There is a time to keep your mouth shut and to keep yourself out of trying to do the Lord's work until your staging has some basic preparation. However, the problem is that some people spend years and years preparing, and they never get out into combat. This would be like somebody continually going through basic training and never getting out into the field. It is not without reason that we have the military image so often compared to the Christian life in Scripture. This is because it is just exactly that. It is being called; it is swearing in, through faith in Christ; it is being trained; and, then it is going out to exercise your service with the weapons with which you have been equipped (as per Ephesians 4--the local church and the pastor-teacher).

However, once you have that basic training, you are to go into the field, and it doesn't take a whole lot before the Lord can use you, in some respects. As you develop, He will be able to use you on a wider scale. However, He will use you very very soon in your Christian experience once you start responding positively to the Word of God. It is preparation and it is the base for service when we learn the Word, but it is not service. A believer in the body expresses the use of his spiritual gifts overtly in the local ministry or in his daily contacts.

Another point is that the body of Christ is one body. We find this in Ephesians 1:23, Ephesians 2:15-16, Ephesians 3:6, and Ephesians 4:12-16, which all stress the unity of the body of Christ. There are no social or racial distinctions made. No commonality in any individual believer can destroy the unity of the organism of the body of Christ. Commonality will disrupt the local organization, but it will not disrupt the unity in the body of Christ. Jesus Christ (the head) directs His body in acts of service. The Lord uses those of us who are willing to be used, and that's normal. For Christians not to be participating in Christian service is abnormal, after they have passed the stage of basic training. The normal thing is that you are exercising your gift.

1. **A New Creation**

Another illustration (comparison) is that Christ is the head of a new creation, and Christians are members of that creation (In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Colossians 1:13, Colossians 3:1-4, Ephesians 4:21-24). Israel was part of the old creation which had been contaminated by Adam's sin. In contrast to Israel and the old creation, Jesus Christ is the head of a new creation. This creation is related to heaven, and it is based upon His death and His resurrection. He is the federal head of this new creation. The standard of the Christian's power in this new creation is the power with which God the Father raised His Son from the dead. That's the power that God has for you to live by; that is, the power that it took to raise Christ from the dead. Jesus Christ Himself represents the first fruits of this new creation which is going to be a whole new company of humanity who will be forever freed from sin and free from death, and will possess glorified bodies (Philippians 3:20-21).

When you become a believer, you are removed from the position in Adam of the old creation, and you are placed in the new creation in Christ. This is done through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. So, a new humanity, the Scriptures tell us, is being created (2 Corinthians 5:17-18, Ephesians 4:21-24). When we enter the new creation, all of our relationships to the first Adam of the old creation are dissolved. When we enter the union with Jesus Christ (the last Adam), who is part of the new creation (Romans 6:2-4, Colossians 3:1-4), the relationship with the old Adam is dissolved. The relationship with Jesus Christ (the last Adam) is entered into permanently. In the future, the believers who are in the new creation are going to be, therefore, released from their old sin nature. You will enter your heavenly citizenship, and you will possess a transformed body like Christ's resurrection body.

Because you and I are part of a new creation, you did not go to church last Saturday. Because we are part of a new order, we have a new day of worship. The old creation used Saturday, the Sabbath Day, as a day of worship. The new creation required a new day to commemorate the fact that they were part of a new thing, so we have Sunday as the Lord's Day as the day of our worship (Colossians 2:16-17, Galatians 4:9-10). This is not to say that Sunday is any different than any other day of the week, but we as believers have set it aside as a specific day for us to gather for fellowship and for instruction in the Word.

1. **The Bridegroom**

The final illustration is that Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride (Ephesians 5:25-33, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7-8). Israel was viewed as the wife of Jehovah, but because of her sins, she was repudiated. So she was the repudiated wife of Jehovah, however, she is yet as such to be restored (Isaiah 54:5). However, the church is never viewed as the wife of Jehovah (as the wife of God). She is viewed as the virgin bride of the Son, Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). After the church is removed from this earth at the rapture, she will be joined in marriage to her bridegroom Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This takes place in heaven (Revelation 19:7-8). This illustration stresses the incomprehensible intimacy and the love that will exist in eternity between the Lord and the church (Ephesians 3:18-19).

It is this illustration that is so aptly used in marriage ceremonies. This passage describing the closeness between Christ and the church is read as to be reflected in every marriage ever performed on this earth. In other words, the marriage relationship here on this earth is supposed to reflect this particular illustration of the relationship between Christ and the church. Most marriages, unfortunately, have many many moments where they do anything but reflect the intimacy; the kindness; the affection; and, the depth of relationship that is between Christ and the church. The church as the bride of Christ in the millennium will not be one of those who are governed by the Lord, but she will be a co-ruler. That's why, in the millennium, you people will be rulers over something. Over some area, you will exercise authority with Christ as His co-ruler.

The Lord Jesus Christ now is preparing a special dwelling place for you in heaven. This is a place which reflects the exalted position to which He's going to bring you (John 14:1-4). Just as in an earthly realm, a husband likes to provide the best house that he can for his bride, so Christ is seeking to produce a dwelling place commensurate with the glory that that bride will share with Him. The church will share this glory in eternity. Hebrews 2:9-10, John 17:24, Romans 8:17, and Colossians 3:4 all teach this. So this illustration reveals the infinite love of Christ for His church; and the intimate unity between the church and the bridegroom; and, the authority and position of glory which the bride will hold.

As you go through these illustrations, it will give you some feel of how different it is in this age to be a believer than it was in any other age past.

**Summary of the Universal Church**

So let's tie all this up here with a major summary of the universal church. I hope that you understand all of these points now. If someone were to come to you and say, "Tell me about the church--the universal church, or the invisible church)," that you would be able to summarize it something like this:

1. **Called Out**

The meaning of the word church is that which is called out; that is, a group called out of the mass of humanity.

1. **Mystery**

Up until the time of the Lord's ministry on earth, the church was a complete mystery. It was a secret. The Greek meaning of "mystery" is something known to those on the inside (that is, God), but not to those on the outside (that is, the people). The term mystery in the New Testament has reference to truth about the church age which was hidden in the Old Testament. It was never referred to. God has incorporated the church universal into his plan in eternity past. However, He never revealed it until New Testament times (Ephesians 1:4). Actually, the structure of the church itself could not begin until after the Lord Jesus Christ had died; until after He had risen; and, until after He ascended up into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. Then the church could begin. The church could not come into existence until these things had taken place. This is because Christ had to purchase the church with His precious blood (Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Secondly, Christ had to rise from the dead to give the church His resurrection life (Colossians 3:1-3). Thirdly, Christ had to ascend to be head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:20-23). Then with these things performed, the Holy Spirit could descend on the day of Pentecost to form the church. The crucifixion; the death; the resurrection; and, the ascension of Christ were all necessary, and they all took place during the age of Israel. It was all done before the church began.

The church began on the day of Pentecost. The tribulation and the millennium are not part of the church age. That is, the church, which began on Pentecost, will end at the rapture. This church age was predicted in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. We found this in Matthew 16:18 and in John 14:20 with the expression, "at that day." The doctrine of the church age was not found in the Old Testament Scriptures nor in the gospels, except for Matthew 16:18 and John 13-17. This is stated in Ephesians 3:5. The doctrine of the mystery (that is, that the church was a hidden secret) is found in Ephesians 3:3-6. Verse 3 tells us the revelation of the mystery. Verse 4 tells us about the knowledge of the mystery. Verse 5 tells us about the definition of the mystery. Verse 6 gives us the contents of the mystery.

The doctrine of the intercalation is in the Old Testament where the church age could or should be mentioned, but it isn't. Intercalation means that the Old Testament left places for the church to be inserted.

1. **Pentecost**

The church age began on the day of Pentecost (John 14:20). The Holy Spirit takes a believer today at the point of salvation, and He baptizes him into union with Christ. This only happens in the church age. The baptism of the Holy Spirit did not exist in the Old Testament. It exists only in this age. It happens at the point of salvation. Anytime you hear any religious leader stand up and suggest that you, as a believer, have not received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he is teaching false doctrine. He does not understand what the Word teaches. Everybody who is born again today is already baptized into the body of Christ. If you were not, you could not be a Christian. It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit that brings you into a union with the Son of God.

This baptism of the Holy Spirit actually began on the day of Pentecost. However, the fact of this is not mentioned in the book of Acts until you get to Acts 11:15-16. Then, in verse 15, we have this phrase, "As on us at the beginning," which is referring to the apostles on the day of Pentecost. Then verse 16 quotes Acts 1:5. So, we know from Acts 11:15-16 that what took place on the day of Pentecost was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. From reading Acts 1, you wouldn't know that what happened to those people that caused them to express their gifts (one of which was speaking in tongues), was the baptism of the Holy Spirit that had taken place. You know that from the fact that Acts 11:15-16 tells us that that's what happened on the day of Pentecost.

1. **Grace**

The church age is called the dispensation of the grace of God in Ephesians 3:2. That means that this is an age of maximum grace available to every person. God certainly has acted in grace in other dispensations, but not on the broad scale way in which He does today. An example of this is that the very Jews who rejected Jesus Christ were the first to be introduced into the church age.

1. **Jews and Gentiles**

The church universal (that is, the church invisible) is made up of both Jew and gentile who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, regardless of denominational affiliations (Galatians 3:26-28). From the moment of regeneration, if you were a Jew, you are no longer a Jew. If you are a gentile, you are no longer a gentile. You now become a Christian, a part of the church (Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11). At the point of salvation, whatever you were before, you are now a believer in Christ and you are baptized into His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:13).

1. **The Body of Christ**

The church is called the body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12. Christ is the head of the body, as we have found (Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22-23). The church has many members as does the human body (Romans 12:4-5). Every member is important with a function.

1. **Redeemed**

The church is the Lord's redeemed, called from the old creation in Adam into the new creation in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

1. **An Incomplete Structure**

The church is likened to a growing but not yet completed structure (Ephesians 2:21-22, 1 Corinthians 3:9). That's where you come in. You are the means by which the body of Christ grows. Christians who are not functioning with their gift are hindering thereby the growth of the body.

1. **The End of the Church**

When the last member has been added to the body of Christ (or to the structure of the church) the Lord will remove his church from the earth (John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, Ephesians 5:27).

1. **Jesus Christ**

The founder of the church is Jesus Christ. He is the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20). The historical foundation of the church was, of course, certain temporary spiritual gifts: the gift of apostle; and, the gift the prophecy, which the early church leaders possessed. Then in time, the gift of prophecy ceased because the Scriptures were now completely revealed, so you didn't need somebody to have direct revelation from God. The gift of apostles ended when John the apostle finally died. He was the last of the apostles to die. With him, the gift of apostle ceased.

The church was left with only two communication gifts. We find in Ephesians 4, that the only two communication gifts left today are: the gift of evangelism, communicating specifically the gospel; and, the gift of pastor-teacher, communicating specifically the full counsel of the Word of God. However, the pastor is also called to do the work of the evangelist; that is, to emphasize, upon proper suitable occasions, to those who need it, the gospel message. So these are the only communication gifts we have today. In the New Testament, the authority and the operation of the local church was easy because they had apostles. Everybody knew who was in charge.

Since then, there has been considerable confusion. Now our apostles have died, and our prophets are gone. We have only evangelists and pastor-teachers left. Who's in charge? What's the structure? What's the operation? In the midst of this confusion, Satan moved right in and brought a destructive misconception on that point that has been plaguing the church ever since (the failure to recognize that some gifts were only temporary, and have ceased). The Lord Himself builds His church (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:47). However, it is a building which is based upon the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

1. **The Bride of Christ**

The church, when in heaven, is called the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:6-8). She is now His body. She will yet be His bride.

1. **The Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit holds the church together as a living organism. He is our operating functioning power.

1. **The Believer**

This is a summary concerning all believers. There are certain things which all of us hold in common during the church age:

* + All Christians are in **union** with Christ.
	+ All are indwelt by **Christ**.
	+ All are indwelt by the **Holy Spirit**.
	+ Every one of you is a **priest**.
	+ Every one of you is an **ambassador** for Christ.
	+ Every one of you has certain things as a believer. Every Christian has **a living human spirit**. You were spiritually dead until the point of your salvation. Now you have a living human spirit which is vital to your being able to receive the Word of God. You have a soul, with a mind; a will; and, emotions (the facets of the soul) on which you will function on this earth, and which has to be brought into alignment with God in order for you to function according to His will. That's where the Word of God in your living human spirit with God the Holy Spirit comes into the picture.
	+ We have **a completed canon of Scripture**. The Book of Mormon is a fraud. The book of Christian Science (Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures) is a fraud. Any implication that the Koran comes from God is a fraud. There is a completed canon of Scripture in these 66 books that we have in our Bible today.
	+ Every one of you has at least one **spiritual gift**.
	+ Every one of you has the privilege of **prayer and worship**, which is often neglected.
	+ Every one of you has the means to be **spiritual** through the simple act of confession of sin because Christ covered all of your sins.
	+ Every one of you has the grace system for perception for learning: **Bible doctrine**. It does not depend upon your human IQ. It depends upon your condition of spirituality; someone who can instruct you; and, your being willing to receive that instruction.

Every one of you *is* something as a believer:

* + Every Christian is commanded to live **a supernatural way of life** (Ephesians chapters 3 and 5). Now this requires the filling of the Holy Spirit. This is the basis for your spiritual growth. God does not call you to become a Christian, and then to do the best you can. God is not interested in your doing the best you can. He is interested in you letting Him do the very best (which is very magnificent) that He can do for you and through you. You are mistaken if you think that the Christian life is just you thinking your way through, and using your good judgment, and all of your human abilities. You are called to live a life you could never live. You are called to reflect things in your character that you could never reflect. It is only as God produces them in us. The living of a supernatural life requires having a spiritual maturity structure in your soul. This is gained through the use of the great system of receiving, understanding, and learning spiritual things.
	+ You are also responsible for **representing Jesus Christ accurately** (Acts 1:8). It is a very very serious thing when you give people wrong information about spiritual things. You are called upon to represent Him, but to represent Him accurately. Therefore, you are called to learn the Word; to take the trouble to learn the Word; and, to think your way through what you have been taught so that you can express it accurately. You are not to give people a wrong impression, and send them off chasing rabbits.

One of the things people don't like about this ministry is trying to find words that express certain concepts. Some we make, and some we pick up elsewhere that have been well-expressed. Yet, this is what Bible teachers have done over the centuries. There is a certain kind of fundamentalist mentality that a person doesn't realize that he's using certain terms and clichés and words that he's picked up from previous generation of Bible teachers. Because he's used to them, he thinks that these are the ones to use.

So, they think, "Oh, you're trying to be really cute. You're trying to be really modern because you speak about 'a spiritual maturity structure in your soul.'" Well, how do you want to express it? How do you want to express getting with it and being a grown up person spiritually. Or they say, "Oh, you talk about 'a grace system of perception.'" Well, how do you want to talk about learning the things that the Bible teaches which you can't learn by your human mentality alone? That's a very perceptive phrase. It tells a lot if you understand what it means, and you can explain it. You know exactly all that's involved: a living human spirit; God, the Holy Spirit; learning the Word; and, accepting it or rejecting it. The Word of God fits perfectly with every one of those ideas.

So every Christian is to be responsible for accurately reporting the Word of God, and it takes vocabulary to do that. It must be vocabulary that you understand, and that the person you're talking to understands.

* + However, there are certain **differences** between us, and these are often forgotten.
		1. In the church age, we all have **old sin natures**, but they're all different. Each Christian has one that differs from the next believer. It differs in his pattern of interests; in his pattern of lusts; in the nature of his weaknesses; and, in the nature of his strengths. Regardless, everything that comes from the old sin nature is unacceptable to God. We are different from one another in our old sin natures. That's why it is hard for you to deal with some people. Some people have an old sin nature that's nasty along the same lines that yours is nasty. So, you have a compatibility with them. You go around trying to find compatible old sin natures. Whether you realize it or not, that's what you're doing. And along comes somebody else, and their old sin nature grinds against something in yours. It strikes some power lust factor in you, and you just can't stand this character because of his old sin nature. You have incompatible old sin natures.

Before you marry somebody, you ought to explore their old sin nature, as well as the depth of color in their eyes. You better not marry somebody with whose old sin nature you are incompatible. That really sets up a ballgame.

* + 1. In **spirituality**, we are not all the same. You are at any moment either carnal or spiritual. You are not some of each. You are either in the inner circle of fellowship, or you're out of it.

Now there is a term. Some people don't like us saying "inner circle of fellowship" and "outer circle of fellowship." However, you who understand it know how very accurately that describes how to be out of touch with the Lord, and yet not lost. It gives a good picture. It says it very well. If you're in the inner circle as the result of all sins being confessed, you are spiritual, and divine good can be produced. The next Christian may be out of the inner circle with unconfessed sin. He's carnal, and he's unproductive.

* + 1. We have differences in our **spiritual maturity structure**. A Christian is either spiritual or carnal. However, he may be spiritual, and yet be immature spiritually. There are three stages: the baby stage; the teenager stage; and, the adult stage (1 John 2:12-14). You progress according to how your spiritual IQ develops. Your spiritual IQ develops to a certain point, and you're a baby. Your spiritual IQ develops further along, and you're a teenager in the faith. Your IQ develops a little further along, and you become an adult. A mature Christian will have the full expression of a spiritual maturity structure in his soul, with: grace orientation; a relaxed mental attitude; a mastery of the details of life; a capacity of love; and, inner happiness. The whole works is there. It is a pentagon of strength for attack and for defense in your spiritual warfare. This depends on learning doctrine and your positive response to it. That's how you develop a spiritual IQ.
		2. We have **physical and personality differences**. Believers do not all appeal to one another. You don't have to all like each other. I know that this is a relief to you to know that. You don't all have to like each other. You don't all have to be carried away with each other's looks. There's no need for you to come and tell me how good I look, because I know that already. Nor do you have to tell me how pleasant my personality is, and how winsome I am, because I know that already. You don't have to like somebody else's personality. We have all been made by the Lord, and therefore there is a purpose even for you.

Furthermore, just because you are irritated by the way some other believer looks, and because you are irritated by some other believer's personality, does not mean he should change it. You will sometimes be told that there is something about your personality that is very difficult to live with. Well, that's your problem--not mine. If your personality has problems with mine, that's because that's how God made you. We trust that we will have enough spiritual maturity that we will be able to deal with each other in a gracious Christian way without necessarily finding ourselves enamored by each other's appearance and personality. We are different in that respect, and it is very very important that we recognize that that's how God made us. Therefore, don't go around getting pushy and trying to change other people's personalities.

* + 1. We are also different in **spiritual gifts**. Each Christian has differing spiritual abilities. While many of you may have the gift of teaching, you do not all have the same thrust of teaching. Some of you are better teaching in some areas than you are another. While many of you may have the spiritual gift of ministry, you minister better in some areas than in other areas. This is a gift that I think probably every Christian has--the gift of ministry. I think that this is where your natural abilities come into play. These are your natural capacities, which are not spiritual gifts, but which God then takes and sanctifies through the use of your gift of ministry. You will have differing gifts. The Holy Spirit's sovereignty decides on the spiritual gifts at salvation, and your spiritual gift decides your responsibility and your authority within the local church structure. It is God who makes that decision. It is we who recognize it.

There will be one more related segment next time, just to tie this up and just to be sure we have clarified the confusion between Israel and the church. We just want to sum all of this up with a brief comparison of what is true of Israel, and the opposite thing being true of the church, so that there is full clarification that you are not under the Jews' law system; that you have entered the liberties and the freedoms of Christ; and, that you understand what it means to be a member of the body of Christ. This is not easy to grasp, especially if your background has been in a denominational structure that did not distinguish clearly between Israel and the church--between law and grace. If you have been around a situation like that for a long time, I'll guarantee you right now that you have a lot of misconceptions. This is a great thing to have been born in the age of grace.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)