

Unity and Gifts

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Preacher: Josiah Fearon

[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 11th of August 2002 The visiting preacher is Bishop Josiah Firon from Nigeria Father we thank you for this privilege to meet and to worship And we thank you now for the opportunity to come before the Open Bible Please minister to each and every one of us that we may serve you better We pray this in Jesus name, Amen I want to begin by saying thank you to you all for your generosity To Jacob and his family and our church

The Diocese of Kaduna For your making it possible for him to be back in Nigeria for his mother's funeral We deeply appreciate this And we pray the Lord will continue to bless each and every one of you And bless our fellowship together in Christ I thought I would want to share some of my fears for the Anglican communion And to do that I want us to look at the whole concept of unity When you see the way things are happening in the various parts of our communion Especially in the Western part of the Anglican communion We have reasons to be afraid And we have reasons to go back to the scripture And actually learn or remind ourselves

What exactly Christ means By the unity of his body And to do that I pleaded with Paul So you notice that The epistle Is not what he actually had On the original program I thought we should look at Paul's epistle to Ephesians chapter 4 Chapters 4 and 5 actually should go together Now if you look at the first three chapters of that epistle You discover that Paul Has actually been describing The new life that God gives us In his son Jesus Christ And the new society That God is creating Through the same Jesus Christ Now in chapters 4 and 5 Paul comes to what I call The new standards That God expects

Of his people He therefore turns If you like From exposition To exhortation From doctrine To ethics And from Christian faith To Christian life So in verse 1 of chapter 4 Paul says I therefore In other words Because of all this Magnificent doctrine That I have been expounding Of the new life And the new society I beg you To lead a life That is worthy Of the calling to which You have been called The question is What is a life That is worthy Of God's call?

And I want to illustrate this With my own example Life experience As a small boy Eleven years old Back in my country When I joined The military school After going through All the documentation We were handed over To the regimental sergeant major A very tough man And he looked at all of us And said Boys You must always remember Who you are What were we?

[4 : 32] We were Inductinated We were made To believe And to behave As future leaders Of Nigeria And so That was actually Pumped into us The way we walked The way we marched You could see that These were young boys Who were really proud Of being future leaders Moving We were actually taught To move with The left shoulder Raised over the right one You know With that Pride Of being Soldiers In the making Friends I believe That Every day As we go out Into the world Our heavenly father Says to us My dear child You must Always remember Who you are And then You see We should behave Like it So the question is

Who are we? Well We are the people of God We are the new society That God has called Into being And this new society Has two major Characteristics Men and women Who have come To accept Jesus Christ As their personal Savior This is who we are Two characteristics First It is one People A reconciled People In the passage Here Consisting of Jew And Gentile And every Color And culture The one And only Family Of God Secondly It is A holy people Distinct From the world And that is why You have that call All the time

Come ye Out of From among them We are A community That belongs To God Therefore Because God's people Are one people They must Manifest Manifest Their unity And that is why Unity And purity Are two fundamental Features Of the life That is worthy Of our calling Brothers and sisters We are One people Of God Show it We are the people Of God A holy people So let us Live Like it That Is a theme The unity And purity Of this new People of God Paul develops In chapters Four

And five But for today The emphasis Is on the unity Of the church So we turn to Chapter four From this Classic passage Of Paul On this topic Of unity There are four Particular truths About the Christian unity That God Intends That are Unfolded here And I want Very quickly To take us Through them The unity Of the church According to This passage Depends On the Charity Of our Conduct It arises From the unity Of our God It is Unriched By the Diversity Of our Gifts And it Necessitates The maturity Of our Growth The first Truth Therefore That the Unity of The church Depends On the Charity Of our Conduct This is What Paul Deals With In verses One And two If you Look at The end Of chapter Three There you Will notice That Paul Has prayed That we May be Rooted And grounded In love And now In chapter Four He exhorts Us To walk In love So prayer And exhortation You see Go together Paul Begins With charity That is Where we Too Should begin Many Christians When talking About the Unity of The church Begin with Structures I personally Believe that Structures are Essential Because an Unstructured Church Seems to Me just Impossible There Must be Some Structure However Minimal In any Given church But We must Not begin With structures Paul Begins

[9 : 34] With moral Qualities And if We have To choose The moral Is more Important Than the Structural So what Are these Moral Qualities Paul Discusses With us Here in Chapter Four First He talks About Loneliness Have you Ever thought That pride Lurks Behind all Discord The conceit That despises Other people Or the Vanity That demands Respect I want to Be personal Here if I may For a moment By saying That the People I Instinctively And immediately Like Are the People Who seem To be Giving me Respect I think I deserve I don't Know about You And the People I instinctively Dislike Are the People Who treat Me like Murder Is that True of You It is True of Me But the Bible Says It's Vanity So behind All Discord Lies Vanity And that Is why The great Secret of Unity Is humility That is The humble Recognition Of the Worth and The value And the Importance Of other People The humble Mind That was In Christ Jesus Philippians 2 verse 5 Paul List other Qualities He talks About meekness Patience Which is Long Suffering Towards Aggravating People Of whom The churches Seem to Be fooled Then he Goes on Forbearing One another Which is Mutual Tolerance Finally He talks

About love Which embraces The preceding Form That is The crown Of the Sum of All Christian Virtues And that Constructively Seeks The welfare Of other People Friends We may Be quite Certain That no Unity Is Pleasant To God That is Not The child Of charity And so Paul says The unity Of the Church Depends On the Charity Of our Conduct And I Hope And pray That our Communion Will go Back to The Bible And no And no I'm Reminded Of this Truth The second Truth Of the Unity of The church Arises From the Unity Of our God This is What you Have in Verses Three To six A close Look at

This passage Shows that The word One Occurs Seven Times Three of Which Allude To the Three Persons Of the Trinity While the Other four Allude to Our Experience In Relation To the Three Persons Of the Trinity So that In verse Four The Holy Spirit Is called One Spirit In verse Five The Lord Jesus Christ Is called One Lord And in Verse Six God the Father Is called One God And Father Of all I want You to Notice The unity Of our Christian Experiences Arises Out of The unity Of our God And this Is clear From the Remaining Phrases Let me Bring this To you In just Three Affirmations Firstly Paul says

There is One body Because There is One spirit There is Only one Holy Spirit And if It dwells In you In you And in me There is No doubt That we Are one Because the One spirit Animates The one Body And there Is only One body Because there Is only One spirit Indwelling And animating The body Secondly There is One hope One faith And one Baptism Because There is Only one Lord Jesus Christ What is The object Of our Faith It is Jesus Christ So There is Only one Faith Because there Is only One Lord In whom We all Believe Again What is The object Of our Baptism Well We are Baptized

[14 : 36] Into Jesus Christ So there Is one Baptism Only Because there Is only One Christ Into whom We are Baptized And what Is the Object of Our hope Jesus Christ And his Coming Again In glory So There is Only one Hope Because there Is only One Christ For whom We are Waiting There is Only one Faith One hope And one Baptism Because there Is only One Lord Jesus Who is The object Of all Three Further Formation There is Only one Family Embracing us All That is what You have In verse Six Because there Is only One God And father Of us All Who is Above all And through All And in All So To put it The other Way around

The one Father Creates The one Family The one Lord Jesus Creates The one Faith Hope And baptism And the One Holy Spirit Creates The one Body So There can Only be One Christian Family And there Can only be One Christian Faith Hope And baptism And there Can only be One body Because there Is only One God Is there Only one God Then there Is only One Church Is the Unity Of the Godhead Inviolable Then the Unity of the Church is Inviolable The unity Of the Church Is as Indestructible As the Unity of God Himself It is no More possible To split The church Than it Is to Split the Godhead And when People begin To complain About this Diocese doing Something different That interpreting Its own Bible I always Said to Myself No one Can destroy The unity Of the Church Now I Can hear Some of You asking If the Church is Inviolably One Is there Any need To bother About our Apparent Disunities And what About our Disunities How can We reconcile The phenomenon Of disunity That we See all Around us With the Biblical Insistence Upon the Fact of Unity I think In answer To these Questions We need To draw A distinction Between the Church's Unity As an Invisible Reality In the Mind And the Sight of God In one Hand And the Church's Disunity

As a Visible Appearance On the Other Contradicting The visible Reality The invisible Reality We are One So God Tells us And yet Outwardly And visibly We belong To different Churches Which even Work sometimes In competition With one Another Paul Recognizes This And hence Where he Emphasizes The unity Of the Church He also Emphatically Asserts the Possibility Of disunity And if You notice Verse 3 In that Verse Paul Says Something That is Very strange And we Ask How can Paul Urge Us To Maintain Something That he Says Cannot be Destroyed If it Cannot be Destroyed Then why Urge Us To Maintain It Brothers And sisters This Exhortation Seems To have Had something Wrong And I Suggest It Has Only one Possible Explanation And that Is That To Maintain This Unity Means To Maintain It Visibly It Means To Maintain It By The Bond Of Peace That Is By Living In Peace With One Another It Means To Preserve In Actual Concrete Realities Of Love That Unity That God Himself Has Created And Neither Man Nor Demon Can Destroy It Means That We Are To Demonstrate To The World That The Unity We Say Exists Indestructibly [19 : 39] Is Not The Rather Sick Joke It Sounds But It Is A True And Glorious Reality And Thirdly The Church Is Unreached By The Diversity Of Gifts And That's What We Have In Verses Seven To Twelve Notice The Vivid Contest Between Verse Six And Verse Seven Verse Six Speaks Of God As Father Of Us All Above All Through All And In All We We Have Got The Same Father Australian Or Nigerian American Or British But Verse Seven Begins But Grace Was Given To Each So Paul Turns From All Of Us To Each Of Us And So From

The Unity Of The Church To The Diversity Of The Church This Unity Is Not To Be Misinterpreted As A Dull Lifeless Colorless Uniformity We Are Not To Imagine That Every Christian Is An Exact Replica Of Every Other As If We Had All Been Mass Produced In Some Celestial Factory On The Contrary The Unity Of The Church Far From Being A Boring Monotony Is In Fact A Very Exciting Diversity Not Only Because Of Our Different Cultures And Different Personalities But Also Because Of Our Different Gifts Which Christ Distributes And Which Enrich Our Common Life Let Me Now Make Just A Few Remarks In Closing One Paul

Speaks Of These Gifts As Charismata That Is God's Gift Of Grace I Think It Is A Pity And A Great Mistake To Apply The Word Charismatic Charismata To To A Group Within The Church I Find No Justification For It In The Scriptures The Word Charismatic Belongs To The Whole Church And The Whole Church Is A Charismatic Community It's Life Enriched By The Charismata That Is The Gifts Of God's Grace The Whole Church Is The Body Of Christ And Every Member Of The Body Is Endowed With Some Faculty To Exercise In The Service Of God And Man But Let Me Say This The Churches That Claim To Be Charismatic I Suppose

Are Giving Us A Challenge As Anglicans And I Want Us To Look At That And Discuss It In Little Groups Let Us Look At What This Passage Teaches About The Charismata Firstly It Teaches Us That The Giver Of Spiritual Gifts Is The Ascended Christ Verse Eight Is A Quotation From Psalm 68 Where Jesus Is Likened To A Military Hero Who Gifts Gifts To Men And Women Like A Victorious Conqueror It Is Therefore A Mistake To Think Of Spiritual Gifts As Exclusively The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit And To Associate Them Too Closely With The Holy Spirit Or Experiences Of The Holy Spirit Because Here They Are The Gifts Of Jesus Christ While

In Romans Chapter 12 They Are The Gifts Of God The Father The Point I Believe We Need To Make Here Is That It Is Always A Mistake To Separate The Three Persons Of The Trinity The Father The Son And The Holy Spirit All Three Are Together Involved In Every Aspect Of The Well

Being Of The Church Secondly The Character Of The Gifts Is Of Wide Variety But Seven Makes This Very Clear The Same Grace Is Given To All But In Different Measures Expressing Itself In Different Gifts We Read Of Some People Write Of The Nine Gifts Of The Spirit As We Have In First Corinthians Chapter Twelve Others Talk Of Only Three Especially

[24 : 41] In Our Church In Nigeria They Talk More Of Only Three You Know Tongue Prophecy And Healing But Friends I Want You To Note That There Are Four Lists In The New Testament And If You Tuck Them Up There Are At Least Twenty Four Charismata And There Is No Indication That These Are Exhaustive Lists In The New Testament Thirdly Therefore The Purpose Of The Spiritual Gifts Is What We Have In Verse Twelve Verse Twelve States Why Christ Gave These Gifts To The Church And It Is Explained In Two Stages Its Immediate Purpose Was The Equipment Of The Saints For The Work Of The Ministry In Other Words Christ Gives Ministers And Pastors To His

Church Not Just In Order That They May Exercise A Ministry Of Their Own But In Order That They May Equip Others To Exercise Their Ministries So The Picture Of A Pastor In The New Testament Therefore Is That Of A Man Or Woman Who Helps And Encourages All God's People To Discover And To Develop And To Exercise Their Gifts To Teach And To Train That Ministries Are Multiplied That Is The Picture We Have Of A Pastor In The New Testament Now Regarding The Purpose Of Gifts All God's Gifts Are Service Gifts To Be Used In The Service Of Others They Are Not Given For Selfish Wasons But For Unselfish And Their Overall Purpose Is

The Common Good I Remember As A Student In England I Met Bishop Kibengere Who Is Now Late And We Got Chatting And He Said Look Josiah From Africa And I Said Of Course It Shows I Black And He Said Well Think Of An Orange Tree And I Went Blank This Orange Tree Is Ready For Picking The Oranges Are Ready Josiah Could You Describe That Orange Tree And I Look Like A Dunce I Couldn't I Just Went Blank And It All Right I Will Help You He Said And I Want You All To Think Of An Orange Tree The Oranges Are Ready For Picking What Does The Orange Tree Look Like The Branches Are That Way And As People Pick They Get Lighter They Get Lighter And They Stand Off Straight Waiting For Another Season That To Me Is The Picture Of Every

Church Men And Women Endowed With Spiritual Gifts But These Gifts Are Not For Their Personal Use The Gifts Are For The Use Of The Body Of Christ They Are Service Gifts Therefore Their Comparative Importance Is To Be Assessed By The Degree To Which They Edify And The More They Edify And Build Up The Church The More Important They Are And That Is Why The Most Important Gifts In The Church Are The Teaching Gifts Because Nothing Builds Up The Church Of Christ Like The Teaching Of The Word Of God And Of The Truth So To Sum Up We Have Problems In Our Communion Today We

Have Become A Laughing Stop To Our Muslim Neighbors And To The Non Christian We Talk So Much About Unity But Often We Forget What The Bible Tells Us How How The Bible Describes The Unity Of The Church The Anglican Church I Believe Is Highly Endowed And We Have A Future We Must Not Allow The Devil To Rob Us Of These Many Gifts God In Christ In His Wisdom Has Endowed Us With The Division Between The Northern And The Southern Hemispheres Should Not Be Mentioned Amongst Us The Northern Hemisphere God Has Endowed The Church There And It Is The Same Church We Have In The Southern Hemisphere Let Us Allow The Love Of Christ To Unite Us And To

[29 : 42] Make Us The True Body Of Christ And It Is With That Conviction We Can Go Out And Preach Christ Who Is The Savior Of All Amen