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Living Hope EFC

Art Smith

Building God's Church is a Team Sport. 12:3-8.

Cartoon: Charlie Brown, *"How can we lose when we're so sincere?"*

Have you ever been really sincere...and lost the game? A business, a relationship, have a prayer request that didn't materialize?

Q: Jesus said: "I will build my church & the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." *HAS HE BUILT HIS CHURCH* – the last 2,000 years?

- **What has been the reason for His success? Sincerity?**
- Humanly speaking, what is required to plant & establish a church?
- *IS SINCERITY ENOUGH?* **Have sincere people attempted & failed?**
- What kinds of actions will keep a church from becoming a reality?
- **What will determine whether or not Living Hope Church succeeds?**
- What kinds of things must happen? What must WE do? ...YOU do?
- *WHY ARE YOU HERE?* Has God brought you to Living Hope?
- Are you sincere? Are you doing that which will help L.H. succeed?

Building God's Church is a Team Sport!

The question is not whether Christ will build His Church.

The question is whether or not we are willing to play on His Team?

The First Priority: Paul's MESSAGE in ROMANS 12:1-2:

1- Because of God's great mercy toward mankind – our reasonable response is to live lives fully committed to Him. Sacrificially!

WE are asked to live by faith in God's reality! (Rom.5:1, 6:6, 8:1,17)

FAITH = "Assurance of things hope for, evidence of things not seen."

- We cannot see God, Jesus, our sins on the cross, our home in heaven
- **We are asked to live as though the invisible is more true of our identity & of God's present work in the world, than what our five senses tell us is reality.**

"We are designed by an eternal, invisible God to be eternal.

"Since birth we've been trained to desire, seek after, be satisfied in the tangible and temporary. We're trying to suck enough out of the things

we enjoy in this life to fill up our hearts – which have eternal capacity.

2- Living such an existence requires that our minds are constantly controlled by God's truth. 12:2 Be transformed!

"If we don't change our perspective on what matters, we will spend our lives confused, disappointed & frustrated by what God is doing."

- **Our purpose on earth is to be used by God for things not seen**, for the reconciling of the invisible parts of people to their eternal God.
- **God asks us to be HIS HANDS, FEET, VOICE, PRESENCE!**
- **We must constantly tell ourselves what God says to be true.**

NEXT PAUL SAYS: **We must Play as a Team, Christ IS Coach!**

Cartoon: "I've Got it!" - We must get organized!

The NFL Draft was just last week. Those drafted had to answer two questions: (1) Are you committed to the sport? (2) Will you play on our team, as a team player?

The Key to all service for God, is to be equipped with His Spirit: Rom.1-8

In Rom.12:3-8 – Paul tells us the Spirit has equipped us with gifts.

In Rom.12:9-21- It is LOVE & the Spirit's graces that make gifts effective.

Principles of playing on Christ's Team with our varied gifts.

1. (Vs.3) **Pride is the main hindrance to playing our position.**

"Each one should not think more highly of himself than is proper."

Q: Why does Paul make such a statement? It is not made in a vacuum.

Gene Getz: "The passages where gifts are referred to most extensively are written to correct the improper use of Spiritual gifts." – 156

- "The Corinthian Church represented the most gifted church mentioned in the N.T. (1:7). Paul spends two chapters instructing about gifts, correcting their misuse. And a Chapter (13)–on **LOVE**, the better way.

μεν: Proud people will not **velcro** together! **12:21.**

- They view themselves as "more important than they ought."
- In Corinth: it was those with the gift of tongues, wealth, lawsuits.
- All 4 books mentioning gifts, also mention love & humility in context.

POINT: An emphasis on "gifts" over "graces" in a church tends to create arrogance, divisions & an emphasis on the "lesser gifts." (12:28)

Packer: "When people see the doctrine of the HS as essentially about performance, exercising spiritual gifts, the thought is that those who are performing are the more spiritual," –27-28

- The church in Corinth demonstrates that gifts can function in the midst of great chaos and immaturity. 11:17, 13:1, 14:20.

ILLUS: **Lutzer:** Wealthy Man (Pastor to Pastor, 29).

- It can be the person who attempts to control, "the church boss."
- Biblical Example: 3 John. Gaius VS Diotrephes.

The doctrine of the HS is primarily about joining believers to Christ, indwelling them for godly living, transforming, enlivening, not gifts.

- To concentrate on gifts is like a man hired to run HP, who becomes so enamored with his office & privileges that he fails to run the HP.
- Or a woman so in love with her dream house she fails to be a good wife and mother.
- **GIFTS** are given for service, to build Christ's church, not for self-glory

2. (V.4) **We are all different, with different functions & gifts.**

- **1 Cor.12:4-7.** Different gifts, service, operations. = **Snowflakes.**
- Every Christian is a unique combination of IQ, personality, abilities.

- While pastors, teachers, moms, dads, counselors, worship leaders may have similarities – they are all different.

POINT: Resist the urge to criticize someone because they don't exercise their gift the way we think they should. God is the designer, we are not.

- There is hardly anything, any more destructive to unity in the church, than people telling others how they should exercise their service!

3. (V.4-5a) It is our very diversity that gives us unity of ministry.

- **1 Cor.12:17-20.**

ILLUS: Thursday the NFL draft took place.

- Imagine – if the Broncos drafted all quarterbacks. “We want unity.”
- “That’s right, we like qb’s so much, our whole team is qb’s.”
- **Uniformity is not equal to unity.** “Likes” repel one another.
- It is only when you have people playing different positions that you have a team that can accomplish the coach’s goals.

POINT: We must recognize that God makes us different to make us effective, balanced & healthy as a church. You need your bro & sister.

- We must be **accountable** in areas such as doctrinal correctness, ethical or moral issues, agreement in ministry philosophy. Besides these—each person is allowed to serve according to God’s equipping.

4. (V.5) Each member belongs to all the others. **1 Cor.12:24-26.**

(1) If we attempt to live and function independently of one another we become useless to God’s purpose – of building His Church!

- Cut off your hand and see how useful it is. **12:21. We die – alone!**
- You were created to mature within the Community of the Church!

ILLUS: *Pastor* went to visit backslider. Sat & watched fire. Log fell away.

- Pastor pushed dying log closer to fire. Caught fire again.
- A member has no meaning apart from the body. **The crisis we are facing in America** - is the notion that I don’t have to go to church, be a part of a group, submit myself to others...to be a good Christian.
- Do you see that this is NOT a biblical perspective? **HEB.10:25**

(2) God designed us to fulfill our function, and receive help & support – within the context of the body.

- We each have strengths & weaknesses. We are incomplete without one another. **We are given gifts for others, not for ourselves.**
- “One Another.” mentioned 60 times in the NT.

POINT: Christians who attempt to live out there existences apart from the Church: 1- will not mature, 2- or be of service to God’s Bride, His Church

5. (v.6) It is God, not us, who determines which gifts we have.

*(1) Gifts are given by grace. **χαρισματα.** -Eph.4:7*

“εχοντες χαρισματα κατα την χαριν την δοθεισαν ημιν διαφοπα”

- They are not earned, merited – there is no room for pride: 1 Cor.4:7.

(2) *They are given as God determines (sovereignly).* **12:11,18,28**

- They are not given because we pray for them or seek for them.
- (So...what does that tell you about the teaching *to seek to speak?*)

You might be thinking, "But I thought it said to seek gifts?" –**12:31, 14:1**

- The verb "**ζηλουτε**" (seek, desire, covet, be zealous for) – is a **plural**.
- Paul is not encouraging individuals to seek certain gifts. He is telling the church, as a whole, to give priority to the greater gifts.
- Specifically – the teaching gifts (12:28), etc. Not tongues & others.
- "As a church–pursue love, and desire the greater gifts be exercised."

(3) *Christians are never told to seek for individual gifts. The HS has given gifts to each Christian.* **1 Cor.12:11**

SO how do I know what gifts I have?

First: Notice that Paul never gives certain tests, definitions, or ways to discover spiritual gifts. He just tells them: Rom.12:6-8, "function."

It is assumed that those who have certain gifts, are obvious.

As we follow the process of being controlled by God's Spirit (Rom.8), and committing ourselves to God (12:1-2), God will lead us by Spirit initiated desires & interests to become involved in His work in ways compatible with our gifting.

Example: Franklin Graham. (File: Bio Sketches.)

6. We must distinguish between spiritual gifts & spiritual graces.

(1) GIFTS are God given capacities which enable Christians to serve others and build one another up in Christ-likeness.

(2) GRACES are the virtues & character traits (fruit) of the Spirit that cause us to act like members of God's Family, after His likeness. (12:9-21).

- Gifts & graces often overlap. Gifts are special measures of grace:V.6-8
- **μεν**: The exercise of gifts, without the graces = a church acting without love toward one another, destroys each other. = Corinth!
- **δε**: The exercise of graces will always keep gifts in their proper rolls, and unity will be maintained in the midst of diversity.

POINT: To be a healthy growing church is not dependent upon knowing our gifts, but upon growing in the graces & practice of Christlikeness.

- What made **Moses** effective? Gifts or obedience? Ex.4. -Paul:2 C.11:6

It is instructive that when Paul gave the **qualifications for leaders** in the church, he did not give a list of spiritual gifts to look for, but a list of graces, character qualities, maturity. = We must not overestimate gifts.

7. (V.6-8) God expects us to function today – right where we are!

- 1 Peter 4:10. Rom.5:1 + 6:11 + 6:12-13 + 12:1-2 + 12:6-8.

ILLUS: Lessons from China (Lutzer: pastor's conf.)

In 1949 Mao took over China, killing as many as 60 million people.

- Atheism became the National Religion.

In 1966 he began a movement to rid the country of all Western influence

- He recruited college students (**Red Brigade**) to go through the country acting as his personal army. Many Christians were killed & tortured.

Lessons The Church in China Learned

- 1- The church is people, not buildings.
- 2- Every Christian is a minister! (The pastors were imprisoned.)
- 3- The value of personal evangelism. (They had no media to use.)
- 4- The value of a pure church. No one joined because it was a popular thing to do. Persecution cleans our liberal theologians & fakes!
- 5- The importance of the Bible. The Bibles disappeared. Most had never seen one. One Student said: "They have a Bible at the library, but it's always checked out."
- 6- The attraction of joy. When people would become a Christian & were asked: "What was it that made you become a Christian?" The most frequent answer was: "I worked next to a Christian & couldn't help but notice his joy, even in the midst of troubles."

In 1949 – there were three-quarters of a million Christians in China.

In 1995- estimates ran as high as 50-60 million!

Whatever men build, men will destroy!

Jesus said: "I will build my church & the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." *HAS HE BUILT HIS CHURCH* – the last 2,000 years?

- **What has been the reason for His success? Sincerity?**
- Humanly speaking, what is required to plant & establish a church?
- *IS SINCERITY ENOUGH?* **Sincere people have failed.**
- **What will determine whether of not Living Hope Church succeeds?**
- What kinds of things must happen? What must WE do? ...YOU do?

WE MUST...

- 1 – We must be related to Christ, intimately.
- 2 – We must trust in our new identity with Him.
- 3 – We must be committed to Christ as our Lord and Coach.
- 4 - We must think of ourselves with humility.
- 5 – We must seek to grow in "graces," and serve as God prompts and leads us to serve one another.
- 6 – We must value one another as God has gifted and designed them.
- 7 – We must truly see ourselves as belonging to one another.
 - We want to become a STICKY CHURCH!
- 8 – We must function right where we are, now.