

THE ORDINATION OF BAPTISM

Scripture: I Corinthians 12:1-27

Most of you have probably never heard of Edward Kimball. Edward Kimball was a Sunday School teacher in Boston in the mid-1800s. You may not know who he is, there is no reason you would, but Edward Kimball is partly responsible for some of us being here this morning. I will say more about that in a moment.

Meanwhile, take out the bulletin insert and look with me at I Corinthians 12. This is one of the most famous passages in the Bible about spiritual gifts, what the Greek New Testament calls “grace gifts”—gifts of God’s grace.

There are two ways to abuse spiritual gifts. One is by pride—having a sense of superiority over other people. That was the problem among the Christians in Corinth. At Corinth there were rival factions each claiming to be more “spiritual,” more deeply and powerfully Christian, than the other groups. They regarded spiritual gifts, especially the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, or speaking in tongues (which means speaking in an unknown language) as signs of spiritual superiority over others in the church.

Half of this chapter is directed against those people. Look at verses 4-6: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of services, but the same Lord. And there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”

Notice how many times Paul uses the word “same” or the word “one.” I have underlined them so they will stand out. Basically, Paul is saying, “Don’t you realize that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, yours and everyone else’s, come from the same God?”

By the way, did you notice the subtle reference to the Trinity in verses 4-6: the same Spirit, the same Lord (referring to Jesus), and the same God (referring to God the Creator). I think this is intentional. Just as the one God comes to us in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so the gifts of the one Holy Spirit come to us in different forms. The church is a unity in diversity, just like the Trinity.

Which means you cannot look down on those who have different gifts. Look at the second column on the insert, beginning at verse 20: “As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’” These verses are aimed at people who think their spiritual gifts make them superior to others, almost to the point of making other people seem unnecessary.

That is not the problem I see in our church. I do not hear people in our church saying, “Wow, I’m an elder. I must be superior to other people.” I hear them saying, “Wow, I’m an elder. I don’t have a clue what I’m doing.” I do not see people in our church lining up to be Sunday School teachers because they consider themselves spiritually superior. I see people

running from Joe Bruce, our Children's Ministry director, because they consider themselves inferior. They feel inadequate. They feel ungifted for service in the church.

Look again at verses 8-10. Paul says,

To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another interpretation of tongues.

Let's have a show of hands. How many of you see yourself anywhere in that list? You see what I mean. Most of us in our church do not consider ourselves superior to others because of our spiritual gifts; we consider ourselves inferior because we think we lack spiritual gifts.

Ah, but here is where the Bible has something to say to us. Look at the first column in our scripture reading, starting at verse 14. Paul says,

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Do you notice how the two columns are parallel? Both columns begin with a general statement of how the body is one but also many. It is both unified and diversified. Both columns start out with that same point. Both columns end by saying that God has arranged the body this way. Verse 18 in the first column: "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose." Compare this to the middle of verse 24 in the second column: "But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member." The two columns are parallel, but opposite. The second column reflects a sense of superiority over others: "Since I am a minister, I have no need of you." The first column represents a sense of inferiority. "Since I am not a minister, I am not really needed by the body." Both are wrong: one by thinking that your spiritual gifts are the only ones that matter, and the other by thinking you have no spiritual gifts that matter.

In verse 7 Paul says, "To each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." When any child or adult is baptized in our church, just as Bethany and Brooke were this morning, we pray that God's Holy Spirit will come down on the water and enter their lives, just as it did at Jesus' baptism. When you are baptized, you are given the Holy Spirit, and with the Holy Spirit come gifts that God intends for you to use to show God's love to the world. You may not prophesy or speak in tongues or work miraculous healings, but there are many other practical, important, and widely given gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Bible that God can use to help other people know that Jesus is Lord, to help other people experience the goodness of God's love in Jesus Christ. You can learn more about these gifts at the Wednesday night class: "Serving from the Heart: Finding Your Gifts and Talents for Service."

Which brings me back to Edward Kimball. Edward Kimball was not a minister or an evangelist or a faith healer, he was a Sunday School teacher at a Congregational Church in Boston, Massachusetts. One of his students was a 17 year old boy named Dwight. Dwight grew up in a Christian home, and his uncle forced him to go to church and Sunday School, but he did not really care much for religion. But Mr. Kimball, his Sunday School teacher, took a liking to Dwight. One day he decided to visit Dwight at the shoe store where Dwight worked. Kimball said that he was nervous about doing this. He was afraid that having his Sunday School teacher show up at work might embarrass Dwight and cause his co-workers to make fun of him. But after walking past the store a couple times, Kimball finally worked up the nerve to go in.

It must have startled Dwight to see his Sunday School teacher standing there in his shoe store. It must have startled him even more when his Sunday School teacher came around the counter, put his hand on Dwight's shoulder, and shared with him in very simple words how much Dwight meant to him and how much more Dwight meant to Jesus.

That 17 year-old's name was Dwight L. Moody. He became one the most famous American evangelist of the 1800s. Moody Bible Institute, Moody Press, KMBI radio are all named in honor of him.

But that is not the end of the story. Later in his life, Dwight Moody talked to another young man who was searching for assurance of God's love in his life. This young man was named Wilbur Chapman. Wilbur Chapman went on to become an evangelist himself and recruited a young assistant to help him. The assistant was an ex-baseball player named Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday then became a famous evangelist in the early 1900s. In 1924 he did a crusade in Charlotte, North Carolina, that attracted a group of business owners who wanted to share God's love in their community. None of these business owners felt they had the gift of preaching or evangelism. But they did have the gift of organization, and in 1934 they organized a series of special community worship services in Charlotte, and at one of those services a young man showed up and committed his life to Christ. His name was Billy Graham.

As a youngster I remember watching Billy Graham on television. His wife was Presbyterian, by the way. He along with many other people helped me want to become a follower of Jesus. That may also be true for some of you. If so, Billy Graham may be part of the reason you are here today. But it all started with a Sunday School teacher in Boston that most of you have ever heard of.

You have no idea what may happen to the children you teach in Sunday School or Bible School, or with the child to whom you give a hat and mittens at the Liberty Park Child Development Center or to the person with whom you share a lunch at the House of Charity, or with the family you help at Christmas, or with the neighbor you invite to church. You have no idea what might happen when you do any of these things. But I will tell you this, when you do these things you are unleashing gifts of the Holy Spirit—the same Holy Spirit that was present at the creation of the world, the same Holy Spirit that was given to Jesus at his baptism and was given to you at yours.

- Ken Onstot
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