

Spiritual Considerations...

Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.



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Strength in Diversity

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Most religious people might be put off by that statement. The reason is that strength in diversity might be understood as a call for an ecumenical movement that demands compromise on conviction. Many will not even finish reading this article because they disagree with the assumed premise.

But that need not be the case. There is diversity within the bounds of similarity in understanding the scripture. When the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and Rome, he noted that the wisdom of God honored diversity in the distribution of gifts. These gifts did not conflict with the teachings of God. They actually fulfilled his mission.

Imagine this scene again. According to Luke's account, Jesus spends the entire night in prayer to his father. We don't know the content of the prayer, or the frame of mind of the one praying. It could have been that he spent the entire night focused on the decision of who would be the chosen 12 with whom he would spend so much of his time.

In the morning, he called his disciples to him. From this group he chose the 12 that we would know as the original 12 apostles. Go through the listing of the names and see how much you know about each particular man.

Philip
Matthew
Andrew
Bartholomew
James
Thomas
Simon Peter
Judas
Simon the Zealot
James the Less
John
Thaddeus

Alongside their name, jot down what you know about each of them. Not just that each was an apostle, but some personality traits that we read about in scripture. Go ahead and do that before you read on.

It's interesting how little we know about these men, isn't it? We must pick up fragments here and there in order to form a composite general character trait. And there is danger in doing that because we might easily over-generalize one incident in a person's life and assume that represents his entire personality – and we could very well be mistaken. Wouldn't you hate for someone to do that to you?

But the fact remains that they were each unique. Simon Peter was extremely outgoing, while we know nothing of James the Less. With a little more information, we might be able to conclude that Peter was an extravert and James was an introvert. But that might not be fair to James.

Philip is certainly portrayed as a perfectionist, wanting to make sure facts and figures were accurate, while Andrew was a people person. After all, it was Andrew that brought Peter to the Lord. When trying to

convince others that Christ had come, Philip told Nathaniel to “come and see” the Lord. Do you remember the incident about the feeding of the 5000? Jesus seemingly asked the question in order to highlight the different approach of each man.

So, you ask, what’s the point?

God honors diversity in distributing talents, abilities and gifts. Jesus recognized diversity of gifts when choosing leaders for his church. Christians ignore the simple teachings of scripture when they assume there is one pattern for every Christian and one way in which each person is to serve. Remember, this is not about the teachings of the Bible, but Christians working together to live out the desires of God in their lives.

Consider these thoughts...

First, strength in diversity allows us to honor giftedness. If we do not help each other find and use our God-given individual gifts in service to God, we might feel as though we have no usefulness in the kingdom. The arena where we learn how to use these gifts is in the church (Eph. 4).

Second, using a diversity of gifts allows us to attract others to the Lord that might not be reached. Isn’t it true that there are certain people at church that we have a natural tendency to associate with? Part of that could be the similarity of our perspectives.

Third, there is balance in our work when we honor giftedness. Our weaknesses are covered by the strengths of others. Our strengths also aid another who has a weakness. We need one another.

Fourth, diversity allows for stability in our growth together. We are like a tree with a strong root system. Some of the roots dig down deep allowing for tall growth. Other roots spread out in more shallow areas allowing for nutrients to be brought into the plant. Destroy either of the roots, the plant will eventually die.

There are, however, valuable instructions and serious cautions given to us in scripture regarding diversity. These are worth reading and seriously considering.

In Romans 15, Paul warns that those who are ‘strong in the faith’ (a more complete description of those who are stronger is found in Romans 14) have a responsibility to care for those who are weak in their understanding. Diversity, in this sense, brings responsibility.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul paints a beautiful picture of how every person in the body has been gifted and is to be valued for their contributions. Competition between members of the body is to be avoided at all costs because it has a negative impact on the body, the church.

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul mentions that knowledge has the tendency to lead to arrogance, which inflates egos and destroys relationships. But, love edifies, or builds up. So, arrogance about what we know is to be avoided and love about who we are and what we are doing should permeate our relationships.

Finally, in 2 Tim. 4, Paul instructs Timothy to preach the Word for the purpose of keeping people away from myths and false beliefs. Specifically, he says to “reprove, rebuke and exhort.” These words are individually indicative of the specific needs people have which require different approaches. Some are doubting and need to be convinced. Others are sinning and need to be confronted with their sins. Others are discouraged and need to be built up. Each of these needs reflects a different personality or perhaps a different stage of faith development where the church can help.

Who knows? You may have been given just the gift that is needed to help someone else find the Lord. Gladly use your gift and give the praise and honor to God who gave you the privilege.