

Grace Evangel Fellowship Pulpit

ADJUSTMENT

A Message

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As with my other writings and talks, I will not be diving as deep as other writers and speakers. My mission is to make truth accessible to the average person – and to provide *you* with something you can share with others that you encounter. Besides, there is a beautiful simplicity in the evangel, isn't there!

Ephesians 4:12 reveals a most interesting truth – the need for *adjustment* within the ecclesia. Here we read of the Lord's provision of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and for what purpose?

“the ADJUSTING of the saints”

What the Concordant Version translates here as *adjusting* is rendered in other Bible translations using a plethora of different English words. But if we examine the use of the Greek *katartismos* in other passages, *adjustment* is the idea conveyed. Using the keyword concordance found within the Concordant Version, you can check me on this yourself. You can also find a number of great articles in the pages of “Unsearchable Riches” magazine that provide detailed studies on the word translated here as *adjusting*, and why the best rendering of the word in English is adjusting.

But why are the saints ... the believers ... in need of adjusting? The notion seems a bit strange at first glance, unless we consider the nature of God's progressive revelation.

We will recall that when Paul began to proclaim the revelation he had been given by the Lord, he faced great opposition from the Judaizers – those insisting that elements of the law be incorporated into Paul's evangel. Truly God once commanded that all elements of the law be observed. But now, Paul was proclaiming, believers were freed from the Law.

When we consider the message relayed in the Galatians epistle, we see that Paul is attempting to bring *adjustment* to their thinking. Paul's evangel was *different*, and his Jewish audience struggled with that. An *adjustment* was needed in their understanding, as God's program was changing. God's progressive plan was moving forward!

The fact that God makes transitions in His interactions with humanity is quite clear. Once He used the Law. Much later Paul proclaimed freedom from the Law. In the time Galatians was written, this transition God was making was difficult to grasp. This truth is still in our day difficult to grasp, at least for many in the churches of our day that continue to stress certain elements of the Law to be incorporated into grace and made to be a condition for salvation.

An example of *adjustment* in action can be seen in Acts 18:24-26. Here we see Apollos, one who was “able in the Scriptures. He was instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in spirit. He spoke and taught accurately what concerns Jesus.” But we read that he was “*versed only in the baptism of John.*”

Now when Priscilla and Aquila heard him speak, they took him aside and they “expounded the way of God to him more accurately.” They brought *adjustment* to Apollos. As he was “versed only in the baptism of John” he needed an adjustment in order to understand the way of God more accurately.

All this to say ... as God makes transitions in His methods of dealing with humanity, *adjustment* in our thinking becomes necessary.

Now let me move forward and focus not on the time Galatians was written, but the message of Ephesians where we find our subject passage. I have been recently revisiting Ephesians in my studies and gaining a greater appreciation for the higher truths relayed in this great epistle. Paul was proclaiming in Ephesians another transition – a monumental transition – a **secret**.

Paul announces in Ephesians 1:9 “the secret of His will – to head up all in the Christ – both in the heavens and that on the earth.” Always before the focus was upon the *earth*, where Israel had superiority and acted as God’s instrument. But here in Ephesians we see God’s program extending to the *celestial realm*. Christ will head up not just those on the earth, but also those in the celestial realm – the celestial beings.

But it gets even better. In Ephesians 2 Paul reminds those of the nations that they *had* been, as non-citizens of Israel, *guests* of the promise covenants – with no expectation. Yet **now** those of the nations are no longer guests, but fellow citizens, belonging to God’s family. The wall between Jew and Gentile is removed and there is one new humanity. *Fellow* citizens!

In 3:6 Paul shares that those of the nations are now *joint* enjoyers of an allotment, and a *joint* body, and *joint* partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the evangel of which Paul became the dispenser. Here is the heart of the secret that had been hidden in God and never even hinted at before Paul’s writings – the word “*joint*.” *Joint* and *equal* with Israel. This was most difficult for those of Israel to receive.

Reading now from 3:8, Paul writes:

“To me, less than the least of all saints, was granted this *grace*: to *bring* the evangel of the untraceable riches of Christ to the nations, and to *enlighten* all as to what is the **administration of the secret**, which has been concealed from the eons in God, Who creates all, that *now* may be made known to the sovereignties and the authorities among the celestials, through the ecclesia, the multifarious wisdom of God ...”

A new administration – a secret – untraceable riches – unknown in times past, even by the prophets – now being made known!

These words were so different – so monumental – that they created a stir within the Jewish believers who were clinging to the Law and to the superiority of Israel in God’s program. So this is why, when we reach 4:12, we find Paul speaking of the *adjusting* of the saints. Certainly a big adjustment was needed with the truth that Paul was now revealing to them. How different it was when compared with their understanding of truth up to that point!

For us today, it’s difficult to appreciate the newness of what Paul is saying in Ephesians. Especially those of us who have grown up within the church – we have never seen ourselves as lesser than the Jewish believer in any way. We have never known of a wall between Jewish and Gentile believers. We have never felt inferior to Jewish believers.

But as Paul wrote these words in the Ephesian letter, they created quite a stir. *Great adjustment* was needed in the mindset of believers in that day.

So, the inauguration of the present administration of God's grace brought many changes with it. And this called for an adjusting of the saints. This adjustment is referred to by Paul as a change from minority to maturity, or manhood (Ephesians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 13:10).

The new celestial destiny severed the saints from earthly, physical blessing, which they had enjoyed as guests of Israel's covenants. The new status of the nations demanded that their *spiritual* growth be completed, so they could effectively serve as the complement of Christ among the *celestials*.

And while our fellow believers today might not struggle with the equality within the body of Christ, with a dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, *adjustment* is greatly needed, nonetheless. The very many denominations and individual churches teaching significantly different things from the same Bible are an indication of the great need for adjustment. Confusion reigns! Unbelievers stay away as they observe the confusion and the inconsistencies being proclaimed.

So much of what a believer clings to is based on tradition and not the revealed truth found in the Scriptures. Orthodox positions were established firmly by the early church – a church into which many traditions and opinions had become fixed and untouchable. If only sound Scriptural truth had been preserved in the creeds, they would serve a valid purpose. But when erroneous opinions and traditions of man are incorporated into a creed and become untouchable – great harm is done. Brother Knoch reminded us that,

"Most of the believers today need adjusting quite as much as those to whom Ephesians was addressed. Their doctrine and experience is limited to the teaching of our Lord while on earth, or his apostles in the book of Acts....How few go to Paul's final presentations and modify even his previous ministries to accord with these transcendent truths! This is the task of the true teacher today. He must, first of all, be an adjuster." (UR Volume 90, page 228).

Indeed, many cling to the early church found in Acts – well before Paul revealed the secret we encounter in Ephesians. The church is, to a large extent, **stuck in Acts!**

And many cling to the words of Jesus – printed in red in many Bibles – giving them preference over any other word found in the Scriptures. But an honest examination of the words of Jesus when He walked upon this earth reveals that He spoke exclusively to the sheep of Israel, not the body of Christ. God had introduced fresh, new truth through the apostle Paul. Paul was Christ's ambassador and given new revelation to share pertaining to the things of God. Yet, few churches recognize the differences in the message Paul was proclaiming, and they revert back to the words of Jesus and to Acts. They give little attention at all to the apostle Paul.

I wanted to share a few more excerpts from Unsearchable Riches, as I believe Brother Knoch to be one of the most (pardon the pun) well-adjusted teachers that ever lived. Certainly his writings have been of great help to me as my Biblical understandings have been shaped over time.

In Paul's preparatory epistles the believers are seen in the period of adolescence. They verge upon manhood. Some of the gifts given them at that time were the relics of childhood. Others were intended to develop them into manhood. The youth learns to talk and to care for his physical frame. These are represented by the gifts of healing and "tongues." The principal task of adolescence is the schooling and training for the duties of life. It is concerned with self-development, not with the care of others or the duties of maturity.

As our blessings are spiritual, among the celestials, we cannot claim the physical endowments of the coming eon. Instead of healing we are given *grace* for our infirmities. Instead of power we are promised *weakness* (2 Cor.12:9). Languages are directly denied to an era of maturity (1 Cor.13:8). Wisdom and knowledge, faith, and prophecy, and the discrimination of spirits may be greatly needed today, but they are no longer individual gifts.

All the wisdom and knowledge we need is found in the secret now revealed. That is God's final word to us. No gift of prophecy is needed (1 Cor.13:8). And by this completed revelation we may test all spirits. The dispensation in which we now live abrogates all of the spiritual manifestations which the apostle so carefully labeled *expedients*. (UR Vol 64, pg. 197-204).

++ [Another excerpt from "Unsearchable Riches" ...]

The gifts were given to readjust, adapt, attune, the saints to the new revelation. The same ministry is needed today, for those who have received the truth of Paul's earlier epistles. We freely concede that much more than this is needed in most cases, for the majority of the saints are stranded in Acts. Nothing but a decided break with that administration will be sufficient to prepare them for even the rudiments of the grace which is ours in Christ Jesus. (UR Vol 18, pg 213).

++ [Another excerpt ...]

Paul, in the thirteenth of First Corinthians, dwells at some length on minority and maturity and makes it clear that, in that era, the saints were not mature. "For," he says, "at present we are observing by means of a mirror, in an enigma, yet then, face to face." He is not speaking here of meeting the Lord, but of full knowledge in an era yet to come when the saints would become mature. That time came when Ephesians went forth.

It is still the function of the pastor and teacher to lead his hearers out of minority into maturity. But, alas, how many of the leaders of His beloved saints are themselves mature? The most alluring spiritual height seems to be those gifts which mark minority. The body of Christ is being dragged down, not built up. Spirituality is usually confounded with emotion, and often with striving after those transient gifts. (UR Vol 60, pg 56-59)

++ [Just two more excerpts, please ...]

The same adjustment is needed today. Many believers have not only failed to understand the mystery, but they cling to that which has been discarded by it, and even to that which never had a place in any of Paul's writings or ministry. Indeed, the word "adjusting" seems quite inadequate for some, who are almost wholly occupied with matters pertaining to Israel and the twelve apostles. But this does not affect their right to the blessings brought by the mystery, though, of course, they cannot *enjoy* them until they recognize and appreciate their transcendent treasures. (UR Vol 59, pg 249-50)

++ [And one final excerpt]

First, that the defaulting error of Christendom rests, fundamentally, in never having recognized the place of apostleship granted to Paul, as well as in not adjusting its faith in keeping with the revelation made known to him alone; that only in his teachings is to be found any right of the nations to have a place before God. This error is like that of the Galatians; a turning back to the evangel of the Circumcision instead of holding to that which Paul preached; that made known to him, "through a revelation of Jesus Christ, for him to be evangelizing among the nations" (Gal.1:12,16). A distinction which he made clear; "that I have been entrusted with the evangel of the Uncircumcision, according as Peter of the Circumcision (for He who operates in Peter for the apostleship of the Circumcision operates in me also for the nations), and knowing the grace which is being given to me, James and Cephas and John, who are supposed to be pillars, give to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we, indeed, are to be for the nations, yet they for the Circumcision" (Gal.2:7-9). (UR Vol 30, pg 144)

++ [End of the excerpts from "Unsearchable Riches."] ++

Adjustment can be a slow process. We cling to the truth we have come to see, and if one introduces a change to our way of thinking – we resist. In some respects this is healthy, as we do not want to be carried to and fro with every wind. But we should always seek, from God's Word, understanding we may have lacked or misunderstood in the past. When others introduce a differing understanding than our own, we – like the Bereans of old – must return to God's Word to see if they might have something – and if we might be in need of adjustment.

I will say, from my own experiences, that I continue to seek adjustment from God's Word. I was excited at first to learn that Paul was a different kind of apostle – the apostle to the gentiles. And I was excited to see how different his teachings were as compared with the truth found in the gospels, or in the words of Peter or others of the twelve. This was a major adjustment for me, having been raised in churches that made no such distinctions, and that gave little exposure to Paul's teachings at all.

So my gradual adjustment allowed me to see the transition God had made through the apostle Paul. But I saw all of Paul's letters as equal in terms of forming my understanding of truth.

As I continue to *adjust*, more and more I appreciate the distinctions between Paul's early letters – before the secrets referred to in Ephesians were introduced – and his later letters – especially Ephesians and Colossians where we see the pinnacle of truth.

I think it's quite clear that some believers require more adjustment than others – as some are farther from understanding the truth presented in God's Word than others. It's also clear that God wants us to work toward adjustment, which is why He gave to the ecclesia the gifts mentioned in the Ephesians 4:12 passage.

Of special interest are the *effects* of adjustment. We see this in Ephesians 4:10-24. It is ...

“for the work of dispensing, for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, unto the end that we should all attain to the unity of the faith and of the realization of the son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature of the complement of the Christ, that we may by no means still be minors, surging hither and thither and being carried about by every wind of teaching, by human caprice, by craftiness with a view to the systematizing of the deception.”

So we begin to understand the importance of bringing adjustment to the ecclesia. And regardless of what gifts one may or may not have, I believe adjustment is a part of our commission within the body of Christ. We might say that this is our Great Commission! All of us have a part to play using whatever gifts God has provided.

Consider for a moment 1 Corinthians 15:28. Here we see God becoming “All in all.” What a powerful phrase! And what a day that will be when at last God becomes **All in all!**

Now in the verses immediately preceding we see that Christ is the *agent* that is causing all to be in subjection to God. Ephesians 1:23 refers to Christ as “the One completing the all in all.”

And that same passage refers to the body of Christ as “the *complement* of the One completing the all in all.”

So let's put this all together. God the Father will one day become All in all. Christ Jesus the Son is the One completing the process of God becoming All in all. And we, the body of Christ, are the *complement* of this One!

Did you grasp that? **We** are the complement of Christ, as He brings all into subjection to God the Father – to the point that God becomes All in all. **We are the complement of Christ!** We play a part in the events leading to the climax of human history, when God becomes All in all.

Now let me shift gears for a moment – for a call to action!

Many, many believers are in need of adjustment to conform with God's Word. Some within the ecclesia are trapped in the traditions of mankind in their way of thinking. Some are trapped by an inconsistent and inaccurate Bible translation that hides the truth from them.

Some are trapped in Old Testament Law – trying to combine it with grace as they live their lives. Some are trapped in Acts, thinking this is the beginning of “The Church” and that it represents the model for today's church, and truth for today.

Some are not so far off but continue to miss “The Secret” that Paul reveals in Ephesians. Others are very far off and need a great deal of adjustment.

And what about the unbeliever? I was struck recently by a most insightful quote from J. G. Machen, a New Testament scholar in the early 20th century.

“The vast majority of those who reject the gospel do so simply because they know nothing about it. But whence comes this indifference? It is due to the intellectual atmosphere in which men are living. The modern world is dominated by ideas which *ignore* the gospel. Modern culture is not altogether *opposed* to the gospel. But it is out of all connection with it. It not only prevents the acceptance of Christianity. It prevents Christianity from getting a hearing.”

I would contend that this problem is even greater in our present day! But whatever the case, one thing is certain – MANY are in need of adjustment. But they are not aware this is the case.

And as for a call to action – this is where we come in.

I'm not suggesting that everyone in the body of Christ is equipped to be a teacher. But I will suggest that everyone has the ability to Speak up when opportunities present themselves. Each of you lives within a unique circle of influence. You are in contact with family members, friends, neighbors, work associates, and at times even casual acquaintances – and you have opportunities, some only brief and momentary but they are opportunities – to Speak up. Those that are within your circle of influence will never stand before me in a place like this, they will never read the books you are reading, they will never come in contact with another teacher of truth.

So – be ready! Be alert! And take time to prepare, so you will know what you will say when an opportunity presents itself through the providence of God.

For more than a few years I trained and coached salespeople and would remind them that taking time to prepare their messaging before encountering a prospective customer was perhaps the #1 factor in being successful. And it's no different in all walks of life. Think about what you say before you say it. Be sure you're clear, and succinct, so you don't lose the listener with some unprepared rambling that leaves them thinking, “What did they just say?”

Be gentle and polite – not argumentative or divisive. Don't think you must share everything you'd like to say in one session. But also, don't hold back in sharing bits of truth here and there as you have opportunity. All of us are a part of the body that is Christ's complement – not just teachers, pastors, or evangelists.

With this in mind, here are a few ideas to think about.

Often when a believer encounters another believer they commonly ask, “What church do you go to?” Have a short response ready. Perhaps something like, “I'm a member of the body of Christ. I'm not affiliated with any of the traditional churches of man – but have fellowship with every other member of the body as we have opportunity. As a matter of fact, we might say we're having church right now!”

If someone asks how your beliefs are different from those attending their church, you might say something like, “I guess the biggest difference is that I study the Scriptures, in as literal and consistent form possible, and allow God to shape my understanding and belief directly from His Word.”

You might consider keeping on hand my short message, “God’s Will For All To Be Saved.” I wrote this to provide a very basic outline of God’s plan to ultimately reconcile all. You might highlight 2-3 key things that you can prepare yourself to share briefly. Perhaps something relating to the word “aionian” or “hell” in the Scriptures.

You could also carry with you copies of my message, “God’s Will For All To Be Saved” and offer a copy when talking with someone. You can find this on my web site, or if you send me an email I’ll be happy to reply with an electronic copy.

What we’re talking about here is what we called in the sales world “an elevator speech.” Think of yourself on an elevator with only a few minutes to share when someone asks you a leading question. Be ready for various kinds of situations.

If you’re with other believers and they *don’t* ask you a leading question, you could start a conversation by saying something like, “I’ve been studying the book of Acts, and I’m amazed at some things I never noticed in all my years within the church. How Peter addressed the sheep of Israel exclusively, for example, and not the gentile believers. Or how Paul, late in his life, was opposed not by unbelievers, but by believers that were zealous for the law!”

Or you might talk about your study of Ephesians and some things you’ve been noticing that are astounding. And how different from and far above Paul’s early letters that it was.

I say these things not to tell you exactly what to say – but to get your creative juices going. The whole key is to be ready, and to have some short, concise, clear things you’re prepared to say in various situations. In doing so, we’re planting seeds that will cause others to think. Don’t try to force an entire package of theology down their throat! They’ve probably had enough of that. But a seed here and a seed there will get people thinking, and it will perhaps cause them to come back to you later for another conversation.

I recently spent some time perusing Unsearchable Riches issues over the past 20 years. I was amazed at how many influential leaders we’ve lost. It caused me to think of Mr. Loudy and how he connected with people every day, causing them to re-think things, and then to gather together with like-minded believers. We’ve largely lost that within our midst. We tend to dig deep and feed on teachings that help us do that – but what about connecting with those outside the camp and planting some seeds there?

And so I challenge you to prepare yourself with some basic things you can be ready to share, to keep your eyes open for opportunities to have these kinds of conversations, and then to speak up and share the truth with others.

Remember; you are the complement of Christ as we move ever toward the point where God becomes All in all. What part will you play?

I recently came across a quote I’d like to share in closing. I don’t recall the biography this came from, but the quote went like this.

“All my life I just wanted to contribute to society.”

What an admirable goal for all of us as we live this life – to contribute! When we share the true evangel or even snippets of truth that lead to some much-needed adjustment in those we encounter, we’re making a contribution to society, helping those we encounter to see God’s truth.

More importantly, we're making a contribution to the mission of Christ Jesus, serving as Christ's complement, and playing a part in God becoming All in all!

What part will you play? What contribution will you make?

This message contains the thoughts and opinions of the author and is a work in progress as his study of the Scriptures continues. Some things that God has revealed are very clear. That Christ died for our sins; that He was entombed; and that He was roused (1 Corinthians 15:3) is clear. That all are to be ultimately reconciled to God thru the work of Christ is also very clear (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). But on many specifics in the Scriptures there are a variety of interpretations and opinions, and none should conclude they have a complete and final understanding on these matters that are less clear. The reader is encouraged to consider various opinions, but to study and to think for himself. Within the Body of Christ we should study and discuss our understandings so as to mutually reach a more complete understanding of that which God has revealed.

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures are taken from the Concordant Literal New Testament and the Concordant Version of the Old Testament. Concordant Publishing Concern, P O Box 449, Almont, MI 48003 (Concordant.org)

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