

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 4:7-11

Message #18 (January 21, 2007)

## CHRIST'S GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

### Introduction

1. Most people enjoy receiving gifts. We studied earlier in Ephesians about the gift of salvation that was given to us because of what Christ accomplished. *For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is a gift from God.* And what a precious gift that is! That gift is seen generally as a gift to individuals.
2. But there are other gifts that God has given to the church. These gifts are given to individuals, but are intended for a corporate purpose. Up front, I want you to know that this is not a sermon on spiritual gifts where we would identify various gifts and see if we could determine what gifts God has given to us and what gifts are for today and what do we do with the sign gifts, etc. Maybe another time we will explore that, but not today. We are going to let the text take us where it is going and see what we can discover. (Which is what we should do any time we come to the Scripture).
3. Let me remind us of the context. Paul had prayed for the Ephesians that they would be strengthened in the inner man, so that ultimately they might be filled with all the fullness of God. They would need this strengthening in order to understand and apply what he was going to share with them in the remainder of the letter.
4. Chapter four begins with talk about walking the worthy walk and a big part of that involves maintaining unity in the body of Christ. We are one in Christ. That is factual. That was part of Jesus' accomplishment on the cross. In order to maintain that unity, there was a call to walk in humility and meekness (or gentleness) patience and forbearing love. Without such qualities operating in us, the church is not going to look much like the "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father or all who is over all and through all and in all."
5. To further help us in walking the worthy walk, God has given to us grace (a grace beyond His grace in salvation). This grace is in the form of gifts to His body from the Lord Jesus

Christ. The gifts are basically in two categories. There are gifts given to each of us and then there are gifted men who have been given to the church. Both of these gifts are designed to help us walk the worthy walk and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. So God did not just tell us to walk the worthy walk. He gave us tools to complete the task. Let's unpack the tools and see if we can figure out how to use them so that we can walk the worthy walk.

## **I. GOD HAS GIVEN GIFTS TO HIS CHURCH**

### **A. The distribution of these gifts**

1. A definition of these gifts: Even though we are not going to study spiritual gifts per se, it is probably good that we at least know what they are. If you want to look further at spiritual gifts, read carefully Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. A workable definition might be: "A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified. Spiritual gifts are not merely natural abilities but are supernatural in nature in that they were specific gifts from God to those who belong to Him."
2. A disclaimer of these gifts – Spiritual gifts are not an end in themselves. As someone has said, "they are not toys to play with or weapons to fight with; they are tools to build with and the goal is to build up the body of Christ."
3. The distribution of these gifts – Everyone has a spiritual gift. (Some would say more than one, but when spiritual gifts are mentioned the indication is that everyone is given "the gift." Here the text says that to each was given grace. Grace and gift are words that are very closely related. Most of you are familiar with the term "charismatic." That is the word grace with an ending. It could be translated "grace-gift." These gifts are given to us by the Lord Jesus according to His own sovereign purpose and choice. (That makes sense. When I give someone a gift, I determine what to give them. It is my choice. It is a gift). At this point, we probably expect Paul to articulate what these gifts are, but he does not do so, Rather, he introduces us to the sovereign distributor of these gifts. Here is what he says about the Lord.

### **B. The distributor of these gifts**

1. A quotation from Psalm 68. This passage may seem a little strange for Paul to quote here. Paul tells us that Psalm 68 had something to do with what he is talking about here, specifically that God gave gifts to men (even though the text in Psalm 68 says He was “**receiving** gifts among men.” Psalm 68 is a psalm of triumph. It is possible that it was penned in celebration of the return of the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. It certainly pictures God as having been victorious over His (and Israel’s) enemies and His ascent to the throne to receive gifts and homage from all men. This quotation here places Christ in that role, affirming His deity and reminding us that He has the authority to rule and to distribute gifts as He determines that will enhance the body of Christ!
2. The major views of “led a host of captives”
  - a. The captives were the **enemies** of Christ - To lead a host of captives could mean that the conquered enemy was led through the streets in humiliation as a spectacle. This was often done by the conqueror. There is a sense in which Jesus did this very thing. According to the Paul’s letter to the Colossians, Christ “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” That’s one view.
  - b. The captives were the **friends** of Christ – (Stay with me on this. It is a little complicated, but you are able to understand it) When OT believers died, their spirits went to “Sheol.” It could best be defined as “a place for departed spirits.” Not only did believers go there, but so did unbelievers. However, the condition was quite different for believers and unbelievers. Luke 16 is the record of Jesus’ message about the rich man and Lazarus. Both died. The rich man was able to look up and see Lazarus who was in place of tranquility and bliss while he was in a place of awful torment. There was a wide chasm that no one could cross that separated the two groups of people. The upper area of Sheol was called Paradise and also Abraham’s bosom. Before Jesus died, He told His disciples that He was going to the Father and He was going to ready up a room for them. Apparently after Jesus’ death, He entered Sheol and led these believers from Sheol to the Father’s house. Hold on to this. We will return to it in a minute.

3. The major views of “the lower parts of the earth”
  - a. The earth itself (incarnation). Certainly Jesus did become man and certainly He did descend to earth – an incredible condescension! But is that what Paul was referring to here?
  - b. The place of departed spirits (Sheol). Peter says that Jesus preached (proclaimed) to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:18-19). Apparently there was a declaration to the unbelievers that He had secured the victory for those who believe. His proclamation sealed the doom of unbelievers and led to bringing believers with Him to the father’s house.
4. What’s the point? Paul is reminding the Ephesians that this Jesus who came from heaven to earth, who lived among men and died in their place, who gained complete victory over death, is worthy and has the authority to do whatever He wants including the sovereign bestowal of gifts to men. Christ’s purpose is to bring all things to completion. A portion of that challenge involves the calling out of a people from every tongue and tribe and nation into one body and He is equipping that body to be built up so that it finds its fullness in Christ and Christ receives the glory! As the exalted Christ, He descended to earth (incarnation) and then descended to the lower parts of the earth declaring victory and leading the OT saints to the Father’s House and then He ascended into heaven with the Father to be highly exalted above all. Those who remain on earth who belong to Him, He is equipping for His further glory. And so He gives gifts for the building up of the body. But He did not just stop with giving gifts to all individual believers. He gave something else, a group gift if you will, to the church as a whole.

## **II. GOD HAS GIVEN GIFTED MEN TO HIS CHURCH**

### **A. These gifted men examined**

1. Apostles – There is some argument about this word. It means, “sent one.” While it is true that the word is used in a few places for a few other people, generally the word is reserved for those who were chosen by the Lord Jesus. These men are said to be the foundation of the church (2:20). There were five tests that had to be passed in order to

be an apostle: An apostle had to have seen the risen Lord; an apostle had to be called/commissioned by the Lord Himself; an apostle was given supernatural revelation; an apostle was given the power to speak with authority and infallibility; an apostle was given the power to work authenticating miracles. Based on such criteria, there are no more apostles today. They passed from the scene with the death of John around the end of the first century AD. However, their impact continues through the record of their lives as recorded in the Scripture.

2. Prophets – The prophets were the recipients of direct revelation from God. They also are described as foundational to the church. In the technical sense, since the completion of the New Testament, these gifted men no longer exist. However, the prophets' impact is felt by the church everyday, through that which they have left us in the pages of the NT scriptures!
3. Evangelists - These gifted men continue with us. They are probably not what we might think when we first hear the word “evangelist.” (Someone has described this idea as a man with ten suits and ten sermons who runs a road show). Evangelists were those who would go into an area where the Word of God was not known and where Christ was not honored as Savior. The Gospel would be preached, people would be directed to Christ, churches would be established and leaders put in place and the evangelist would move on. The probable equivalent for today would be “church-planting missionaries.”
4. Pastor-teachers – These men also exist today. These could be separated into two distinct groups of gifted men, but the way Paul recorded this grammatically, it appears that this is a description of one person. A pastor has the obligation of both preaching (proclamation) and teaching (systematic instruction) of the Word of God. To these men God has entrusted the charge of souls. It is a calling of being a guardian or custodian, a protector and director and leader of the flock entrusted to this under-shepherd's care. It is a tremendous privilege and also an enormous responsibility. (Note Acts 20:28-35 for a historic description of the charge). Pastor and elders and bishops are all words describing the same person. Elder tells us who the man is. Bishop identifies what he does (oversees); and pastor expresses his attitude and

character. (I am confident that God has led me and called me to be a teaching shepherd. On the basis of this passage I am a gift to the church, but I must always remember that it is only because He entrusted such a gift to me. (Paul was a mighty apostle, but he saw himself as a servant of Christ, a steward, an attendant who was to give out what God gave to him). There was no reason to become arrogant because of a gift possessed, but rather to be humbled and awed by the responsibility to be obedient to Christ, walking worthy of such a responsibility!

B. These gifted men assigned (We will get into this more next week, but as a summary, we could say that the many gifts given by Christ to His church are designed to make the body increasingly more unified and more mature in practice).

1. Verse 12 makes it clear that Christ has given gifts to individuals in the body that the body might use these gifts to make the whole better.
2. Verse 12 also reminds us that Christ gave to the church gifted men so that all might be equipped so that the members of the body will be effective in doing the work of the ministry. And as all are working together, the body is being built up, and as the body is being built up, it looks more and more like Christ and that brings Christ greater glory! And His glory is what it is all about!

## **Conclusion**

1. So, how are we doing in terms of using whatever gifts God has given to us to serve the body and glorify Christ? If we are not using what He has given to us, we are holding back and the body is suffering at that point and God is being robbed of His glory! That's not good. In the words of John MacArthur, "Not to use our gift is an affront to God's wisdom, a rebuff of His love and grace, and a loss to His church. We did not determine our gift, deserve it or earn it. But we all have a gift from the Lord, and if we do not use it, His work is weakened and His heart is grieved. The intent of the text before us is to reveal the balanced relationship between the oneness of believers and their individuality which contributes to that oneness."
2. Further, how are we responding to the gifted men that God has given to the church? They are given to equip. If you are not taking advantage of that or if they are not giving

of themselves to equip the saints for the work of ministry, then the body suffers and God is not glorified and that cannot be good!

3. May God's Spirit convince and convict us to so live that the body will be built up and so that Christ will be glorified.