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## **God's Gifts to the Church**

### **Ephesians 4:7-16**

#### **Introduction**

This is a wonderful passage that delineates the gifts, or more correctly, the gifted people that Christ has given to the church. Understanding the gifted people of the church is a key to the unity of the body of Christ. We cannot be independent, but we must be interdependent. We need each other. As members of the church, the body of Christ, we have many gifts. By those gifts we serve God and serve one another. These gifts are given to every believer, and they are a result of the grace of God working in our lives. It is through our gifts that we, in Christian love, serve one another.

#### **I. The Principle of Grace Gifts, 4:7**

1. The gifted people are an act of God's grace. Note first of all that these gifts are given to "each one of us." No one is overlooked! Everyone has at least one spiritual gift.
2. When we receive Christ, we receive the gift of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:38; 11:17. These gifts in the life of all believers are a work of the grace of God in us, 2 Cor 8:8-15. Jesus is our pattern to complete the work of Christ in us with a willing mind.
3. There are two categories of grace gifts. First, there are individual gifts given to the members of the body, the church, see 1 Cor 12:4-11, 27-31 (see 12:12-26 for the reason gifts are given); Rom 12:3-8 presents a second list of gifts to individual members. Second, God also gives gifted people to the church, Eph 4:11-16.

#### **II. Grace Gifts Are a Work of the Holy Spirit, 4:8-10**

1. Grace gifts should not be confused with talents such as singing, playing music, sewing, painting, etc. Grace gifts are spiritual gifts given to us by Christ through the Holy Spirit after Christ ascended (4:8-9), and beginning on Pentecost, Acts 2:1-13 (see "The Work of the Holy Spirit" chart from the *Criswell Study Bible*, page 1541).
2. Ephesians 4:8 quotes Psalm 68:18 and says Jesus ascended and gave gifts to believers. Jesus, as our King, ascended on high, but first He descended into the grave, He led captivity captive, and then He gave gifts to believers. He "ascended on high" refers to the ascension of Acts 1:9-11; His descending refers to His going into the realm of the

dead, *hades*, or the grave, 4:8; His giving gifts to believers refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, see Phil 2:9; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; Acts 2:4, 33; 10:44-46; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Eph 4:7-11; 1 Tim 1:13; Ps 78:60.

3. Ephesians 4:9-10 are difficult, but they tell us Jesus went into the grave to the realm of the dead and announced His victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave, 1 Cor 15. He led captivity captive and gave the spoils of His victory to the church, "that He might fulfill all things," see 2 Cor 1:20; see also 1 Pet 3:18-22; Col 2:14-15; 1 Cor 15:53-58.

### III. **God's Gifted People Given to the Church, 4:11**

The following are the gifted people that God gave to the church. These gifted believers were used of God. They fall into two groups. First, there are those whose ministry continues, but whose office has ceased, namely apostles and prophets. Second, there are those whose ministries continue and amplify the work of the apostles and prophets, which are the evangelists and pastor-teachers.

1. **Apostles** - The name comes from the Greek *apostelous*, meaning "one who is sent." The ministry of the apostles was foundational to the life of the church as stated in 2:19-22. While their ministry was brief, their effect was eternal as preserved in God's Word. There are no longer any living apostles who can meet these six qualifications:
  - Apostles all were appointed personally by Jesus, including the twelve apostles or disciples that He chose, see Matt 10:1-4, plus Paul who was confronted by Jesus on the Damascus road, Acts 9:1-9.
  - Apostles were those able to give an eyewitness account of the life and ministry of Jesus, see John 21:24-25; 1 John 1:1-4; Luke 1:1-4; 24:44-49.
  - Apostles were personally promised a special place in the coming Kingdom of our Lord, see Luke 22:28-30; Rev 21:14.
  - Apostles also include a few other key believers such as Barnabus, James, Timothy, Andronicus, and Junia, Rom 16:7.
  - Apostles composed the early body of doctrine that guided and governed the early church, see Acts 2:42.
  - Apostles' ministry was authenticated by signs and wonders or miracles as noted in Heb 2:1-4; 2 Cor 11:27; 12:12; Acts 2:43; 19:11-12; 28:3-6.
2. **Prophets** - Greek *prophates*, "one who proclaims the Word of God." The early New Testament church had no writings other than the Old

Testament. There were some prophets that Paul warned must have their words affirmed by another, 1 Cor 14:29-33. One of the most challenging issues in the New Testament church was a proliferation of false prophets, see Jude and Titus. Good prophecy is good proclamation of the Word of God and does not have anything to do with secret revelations and new doctrine. Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 13:3, 8 that prophecies would cease. In his commentary on Ephesians, Harold Hoehner states:

The NT prophet most likely corresponds with the OT prophet when revelation and authority are concerned. In the present verse [4:11] the prophet is listed among the foundational gifted persons who prepare saints [believers] for the ministry and build up this new body, the church, revealed from the mystery. In many ways the prophet and apostle had similar functions, much like many ministries today, but their emphases differed. The emphasis for the apostle was more on the divine commission to a specific task of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and the building up of churches, whereas for the prophet it was the communication of divine revelation, see Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

3. **Evangelists** - Greek *euaggelistas*, "proclaimers of the Gospel" and a word from the same root as *euaggellion*, "gospel." This word occurs two other times in the New Testament, one as a designation of Philip in Acts 21:8, see also Acts 8:26-40 where Philip shares the Gospel with the Ethiopian eunuch. Second, the same word also is used in Paul's admonition to Timothy to do the work of an "evangelist" in 2 Tim 4:5.
4. **Pastor-teachers** - This phrase names "pastors and teachers," a fact that has caused some to consider this two classes of gifted people rather than one. But, the use of the Greek conjunction *kai* often is used, as it is in this context, to be an explicative translated *that is*. This means that the statement refers to one person. So the correct translation in 4:11 would be "and some to be pastors, that is, teachers." This refers then to the office of pastor-teacher. The word pastor, Greek *poimen*, literally means a shepherd who was leader of his flock, the local congregation. But the *shepherd* also was to be a teacher.

The office of pastor-teacher was given to the church. As shepherd, he was to guard, guide, and protect the flock and to provide sustenance, food, and water. The main duty of the pastor is to equip believers to do the work assigned by Christ, the head of the church. So the pastor is to bring the flock to maturity, Col 1:28; 4:12; 2 Cor 13:11; Jas 1:4. In the modern era, the pastoral role has become more like a CEO, administrator, educator, visitor, counselor, and preacher. There is nothing wrong with the pastor who does these things, but the primary role of the pastor is to tend the needs of the flock.

There are several significant passages that help to define the role of the pastor-shepherd of the flock. Perhaps you have never thought of Psalm 23:1-6 as a pastoral psalm. It clearly defines the role of the shepherd, God personally being the prime example. First, the shepherd meets the needs and wants of the flock, v. 1. Second, the pastor provides spiritual refreshment for the flock, v. 2. Third, the pastor leads by example to restore and walk the paths of righteousness for the sake of his call and reputation with God, v. 3. Fourth, the pastor is there to comfort, guide, guard, protect, chasten, and discipline the flock, v. 4. Fifth, the pastor is spiritually to feed and anoint the flock with the power of the Word, v. 5. Finally, the pastor is to lead all to follow Him in goodness and mercy and to work for the goal of reaching our heavenly home to live with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit forever.

In addressing the Ephesian elders who met him at Miletus, Paul told them to watch over the flock, guide the flock, protect the flock, feed the flock, and pray for the flock, see Acts 20:28-38. Also, Paul, in writing to Timothy, instructed him to give priority to the scriptures, to give priority to teaching sound doctrine, to proclaim truth, to do the work of an evangelist, to endure hardship, and to faithfully serve the church, 2 Tim 3:10-4:7.

#### **IV. God's Purpose for Gifted People Given the Church, 4:12-16**

- 1. Maturity in the Body** - These gifted people were assigned the role of "equipping" believers to do the "work of ministry," v. 12. This underscores the fact that the role of the gifted people given to the church are expressly assigned the role of preparing the whole body of Christ for the ministry, see Acts 6:4; Rom 12:7; 2 Cor 4:1; 5:17-18; Col 4:17. These verses make clear that we are all to be ministers or servants of one another in the body of Christ. The formal office of a

"minister" is a variant way of describing the called out ministry of a pastor-teacher.

2. **Maturity of Individual Members** - Not only are we to minister to one another as a matter of general practice in the body of Christ, we are to promote "unity" and perfection in the body. The word "perfect" is the Greek *telios*, which refers to maturity not sinless perfection. The maturity that we should seek is to be as "perfect" and mature as was the fullness of Christ, v. 13.
3. **Maturity of Congregations** - Not only is this a reference to personal maturity but to congregational maturity. Collectively, the children of God and the body of Christ should be stable theologically, doctrinally, morally, spiritually, emotionally, and behaviorally, v. 14.
4. **Maturity Evidenced in the Body** - The evidence of our reaching this plateau of maturity is when we do the following:
  - Believers should always speak the truth, v. 15a.
  - Believers should speak the truth in love, v. 15b.
  - Believers should grow up in all things of Christ, v. 15c.
  - Believers should seek spiritual growth and maturity by feeding on the Word, see Ps 23:1-3; Jer 3:15; John 21:15, 17; Heb 5:12-13; 1 Pet 2:1-3.
  - Believers should grow in relationship with the rest of the body, each one fulfilling their own place and exercising their own gifts, Rom 12:3-8 and 9-21; 1 Cor 12:1-11; 27-31 and 12:26.

## Conclusion

Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Memorial Church, states it well:

The gifted leaders are supposed to equip the saints [believers] unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ. The saints do not call a pastor and pay him to do the work. They call him and follow his leadership as he, through the Word, equips them to do the job (2 Tim 3:13-17). The members of the Church grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other. The first evidence of spiritual growth is *Christlikeness*, from Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, a commentary on Ephesians.

The evidences of maturity are:

1. Christlikeness - Eph 4:12-13; 2 Tim 3:13-17
2. Stability in the Word and doctrine - Eph 4:14
3. Speaking the truth - Eph 4:15
4. Cooperation with other members of the body - Eph 4:16