

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (5-5-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 4:7-12  
Spiritual Gifts

Additional Bible Readings: Romans 12:3-8;  
1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11

Introduction

Paul has more to say about unity in these verses. Unity is deepened by various gifts being used to build one another up, so that we serve Him and one another effectively and unitedly.

Going to look first at the Giver, then the gifts named here. Finally the reason why the Giver has given the gifts.

The Ascended Christ – the Giver of the spiritual gifts

**To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it** (Ephesians 4:7). Christ's grace has given us different and various gifts. χάρις is "Grace", χαρίσματα is "Gifts". Grace not only saves us, but equips us to serve the Lord. The word "charismatic", which comes from the Greek word for gifts, must not be given to one group of Christians who stress certain spectacular gifts, especially tongues, prophecy and healing. The whole church is meant to be a charismatic community, in the true sense of the word. Every Christian has a gift to use.

**When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men** (Ephesians 4:8). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul is adapting the words of Psalm 68:18. First of all, He descended to the lower earthly regions – references to His incarnation and all depths of humiliation which His sin-bearing death involved. He suffered the agonies of hell as He was abandoned by the Father. Then He ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things. His first exaltation in the universe – fills the universe with His power and presence. Picture of Roman conqueror – triumphal procession in Rome, parading all his defeated enemies in chains, distributing gifts to people along the route of the procession.

So Christ, having defeated sin, Satan and death by His Cross and resurrection, is now giving gifts to His people that they might serve one another and glorify Him. The conqueror has routed His enemies, finished His campaign, returned triumphantly to heaven. Now by His spirit He is showering His people with various gifts for service.

If we belong to Christ, we have all received gifts through the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Church is not drab colourless uniformity, but rich diversity. God has made the stars different, and individual design to each flower, and He makes His people different. Christ's body has different organs – like a physical body – all contributing to the work as a whole.

The gifts which the ascended Christ bestows

Now Paul describes some of the gifts which the Lord bestows – all connected with the Word of God. Four are named here, but these are only a few of the gifts. There are at least 20 in New Testament lists (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12 & 14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4). Some are supernatural, others are natural talents used by the Holy Spirit. Unlikely that these 20 are a complete list. Some were for the apostolic period, others were for all time. Some of those only for the apostolic period are given in this passage.

**It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11)**

The term “Apostles” *αποστολος* is sometimes used in scripture to mean every Christian, literally meaning “he who is sent”, e.g. John 13:16. Sometimes the term refers to missionaries (2 Corinthians 8:23). Here it refers to a very small distinctive group – the 12 disciples, Paul and James, the Lord’s brother, and maybe one or two others. They were eyewitnesses of the resurrection, personally chosen and especially inspired by the Lord. Special miracles authenticated them. Their teaching is found in the New Testament – the foundation truths of the Christian faith. They had unique authority and knowledge of the truth. There are no apostles today. We have the New Testament containing their teaching, and there is no new teaching to be added. So the gift and office referred to here was temporary.

“Prophets” were those who had immediate revelation to speak from the Lord and foretell the future. They had special revelation of God’s will for a situation. They were sent to encourage and help. There are no prophets in this sense today. No one has special knowledge of God’s truth in addition to the Scriptures. Our spiritual knowledge is through the Spirit teaching us through the Word. No new truth today to be added to the New Testament. Some people may have special insight into God’s Word, and see where it applies in our situation, but this is not new truth, just deeper understanding of old truth. Therefore the gift and office of prophet was a temporary gift, until the truth was set out in the written words of the New Testament writings.

“Evangelists” means those with the gift of evangelistic preaching – of making the Gospel plain to unbelievers and relevant to their situation. Not just witnesses – which every Christian should be – but having special gift of evangelism. The evangelists extended the knowledge of the Gospel.

Then it was the job of “pastors and teachers” to edify and build up the Church. Generally agreed these two words refer to the same office. *τους δε ποιμενας και διδασκαλους* - one definite article covers both nouns. “Pastor” literally means shepherd. His job is to tend and feed the flock of God, protect them from danger of error, and to see that they are nourished.

In the local church, there is the flock of sheep of which the pastor is the shepherd under the chief Shepherd. His instrument or staff is the Word of God. By it, the sheep are guided, disciplined and nourished. The Word of God must be paramount in the church – read, preached, applied and obeyed. No amount of entertainment, social occasions or other religious substitutes can take its place. Essential that the shepherd is also the “Teacher” – who knows and loves the Word, and is himself under its authority, and has ability to explain and teach and apply it.

In himself, the pastor-teacher is nothing. He is a sinner saved by grace, the “leaster of all the saints”. But the Word he brings is to be heeded and obeyed. To reject the Word is to reject Christ. The preaching of the Word is not something which has developed over centuries. It originated with the Lord. His call, His equipment, His Word. It is not the preacher’s place to comment on current events, to entertain by telling stories, or to be a comedian in the pulpit with a string of jokes. He is there to preach the Word, fearlessly, carefully, warmly and interestingly. And his life is to be a living example of a man under the Word.

### Reason why the ascended Christ has given these gifts to the church

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers have been given to the church and been gifted by the Lord to encourage and help the members of the church to use their gifts fully and properly for God’s glory and service to others. **To prepare God’s people for works of service** (Ephesians 4:12). *καταρτισμος* – the noun is used here for “equip” or “perfect”, as opposed to the verb *καταρτιζω* used in Matthew 4:21 for “mending nets”. The equipping of the saints for the work of ministry or service is the immediate object. **So that the body of Christ may be built up** is the ultimate result.

All God’s people have gifts. All God’s people are to be ministers or servants. Ministry is not the prerogative of a clerical elite. It is the privilege of all God’s people. There is a place for specialized or pastoral ministry – not to monopolize or control the church but to help and encourage all God’s people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching, training, pastoral care and counsel must be directed to that end. Not to monopolize, but to multiply ministry.

The model of a church is not a pyramid with the pastor perched at the top, not a bus with the pastor doing all the driving with congregation as passengers asleep in the back. The biblical model of a church is a body, every member having a distinctive function. The pastor’s task is to help all to find and exercise that function.

The Pastor teaches, using the revelation of the Apostles and Prophets, after the people are evangelized – and he does so to help all God’s people use their gifts for service to build up Christ’s body, the church. The result – the church will grow and mature and develop, and unity will be deepened. Not just “priesthood of all believers”, which was so emphasised at the Reformation, that all Christians had access to God through Christ, but also “ministry of all believers”, for every Christian is gifted by the Lord to minister to other men.

### Conclusion

The risen and exalted Christ has bestowed through the Spirit a variety of gifts on the church. Teaching gifts are primary and have the purpose in equipping God’s people to exercise their gifts. The result is the church will be built up, matured, will grow, and become unified and serviceable.

In application – every Christian had a gift, a God-given ability to serve and glorify God and others. Not a toy to play with, but a tool to build with. If not used in love, these gifts can become weapons to fight with – as happened in Corinth. Not

something to be proud of or to boast of. A gift is a gift. **What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?** (1 Corinthians 4:7). Not for us to make a name for ourselves. To be used in connection with fellow Christians in the Church. The Bible does not let us be an isolated hand or spare foot – we are all members of a body. Gifts are to be used to build up that body.

A gift is given by the Head of the Church is His sovereign wisdom. We must not to despise others or be envious of others, jealous of their different gifts. All gifts are different and all have a part to play. No one must feel threatened, for all are essential. If we are envious or despise others, we are questioning the wisdom and purposes of the Lord. Be content with the gift and task to which you are called. It does not matter if you are never praised by men – you are important to God, and the main thing is to please Him.

Do you know what your gift is? Ask Him to show you. No one has all the gifts, and everyone has one. Value it. Thank God for it. Be satisfied with it. It was chosen expressly for you.

*“What is my being but for thee,  
Its sure support, its noblest end.  
Thy ever-smiling face to see  
And serve the cause of such a friend”*  
Philip Doddridge