

# Gifts from Above

Ephesians 4:7-11

Most of us love to receive gifts. There is something special about receiving something that was carefully selected for you by someone you love. Gifts express love.

The greatest giver of gifts is God. James 1:17 says, **"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights."** That means that every **"good"** thing, every **"perfect"** thing in your life is a gift from God. Your health, your safety, your home, your job, your spouse, your children, your parents, your church, your friends, etc... Even the ability to get out of bed in the morning, the next breath you take is a gift from God. John the Baptist said, **"A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven"** (Jn.3:27). Jesus said in Lk.11:9, **"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."**

God's greatest gift is salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. The most familiar verse in the NT, John 3:16, tell us this, **"For God SO LOVED the world that He GAVE His only begotten Son..."** Romans 6:23 says, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

In today's passage, the theme is the gifts that come with salvation, what Paul elsewhere calls spiritual gifts.

We are going to learn three vital truths: every believer has spiritual gifts, every spiritual gift is from Jesus, and every church is gifted with spiritual leaders.

## I. Every Believer has Spiritual Gifts (v.7).

### A. From Unity to Diversity.

Notice the context, how in the first part of this chapter Paul has been telling us about all those privileges that we share in common as Christians. The emphasis is our unity. We are all in **one body**, indwelt by **one Spirit**, knowing **one hope**, acknowledging **one Lord**, sharing **one faith**, experiencing **one baptism**, worshipping **one God** and Father of us all. All believers, all those who are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, share all these things in common. The weakest lamb in the flock of Christ shares these blessings.

Now if this unity of blessing were all that defined us, then you might expect Christians to be a rather monochrome people. You might expect all Christians to dress the same, act the same, and talk the same. Often that is what the cults produce, uniformity. But that is not at all what you get in the church. What a range of people and congregations you meet!

What is the church? Back in chapter 1 of Ephesians Paul has already defined the church as the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). 1 Corinthians 12:27 also says, **"Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually."**

How does the body of Christ function? It functions in a similar way that our physical bodies function. In our bodies of flesh and bones, there are a variety of cells. The body operates, not by the cells getting together and voting about what is the best thing to do, but by simply doing what they individually and particularly were designed to do. It is the function of the

head to correlate this and bring it all together and make it operate effectively, but each cell gives itself to the task of functioning according to its design.

Paul reminds us that the secret of the operation of the church is that each Christian has a gift. V.7 says "**to each one of us**," to each believer, "**grace was given**." Now Paul has talked about "**grace**" a lot already in this letter. In Chapter 2 we saw that we are saved by grace. Salvation is God's undeserved favor on us, making us alive in Christ even when we were dead in sins.

"**Grace**" is not Paul's usual word for spiritual gifts. But he used the word in this way in 3:2, 7, & 8, where it refers to God's grace that called Paul into his ministry toward the Gentiles. It focuses on God's undeserved favor that took Paul from being a persecutor of the church to an apostle and preacher of the gospel.

But, here he says that this same grace extends to "**each one of us**."

Paul is emphasizing that each individual believer has this grace, a gift that comes from Jesus Christ. Our unity does not necessarily mean uniformity. God loves His people as a whole or "**all**" and He loves His people as individuals or "**each**." The Lord is not only concerned with the unity of the body but also with the unique giftedness of every believer. To the Father, each one of us is "special."

There are four chapters in the New Testament that talk about spiritual gifts, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Peter 4. The significant thing is that each chapter emphasizes that every believer has at least one spiritual gift.

#### Romans 12

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to **each one** a measure of faith.

4 For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

6 Having then **gifts** differing according to the grace that is given to us,

#### 1 Corinthians 12

4 There are diversities of **gifts**, but the same Spirit.

5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord.

6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.

7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to **each one** for the profit of all:

#### 1 Peter 4

10 As **each one** has received a **gift**, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

So if you have received God's gracious gift of salvation, you have also received His gracious spiritual gift to use for His glory.

## B. Understanding Spiritual Gifts.

What is a gift of the Spirit, or a spiritual gift?

Spiritual gifts are special abilities for the service of the Lord that you received the moment you accepted Jesus. As the Holy Spirit moved into your life, He brought with Him gifts for you to use in serving.

Warren Wiersbe defines a spiritual gift as **"a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified."**

Here are some things we know about spiritual gifts:

### **1. Christ distributes these gifts according to His sovereign purpose.**

Verse 7 says, **"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."** Jesus Christ, through His Holy Spirit determines the gifts He gives and how they are to be used. Spiritual gifts are not given by the church. They are not given upon graduation from a seminary or Bible college. They are not handed down from mother or father. They cannot be purchased or earned.

Spiritual gifts are not human talents or natural abilities. God has given each of us natural talents or abilities: music, art, engineering, mechanics, academics. We say that we have a "knack" for certain things. These are natural gifts that come to us by birth. Spiritual gifts are abilities that we did not have before and that we use for the Kingdom. They come us to through the New Birth.

There are three lists of spiritual gifts in the NT: **1 Cor.12:4- 11, 27-31, Romans 12:6-8, and Eph.4:11**. Since not all these lists are identical, we can probably conclude that they are representative of the kinds of spiritual gifts God gives. Some of these gifts are *ministering gifts* that build up the body. Others are *serving gifts* that help others. Others were *sign gifts* that were given to authenticate the gospel.

### **2. Since Christ gave these gifts, we must use them as He directs.**

Again, v.7 says **"each one of us"** has a spiritual gift. There is no such thing as an ungifted believer. You have at least one spiritual gift. We discover and develop our spiritual gifts by ministering with and to other Christians.

The Lord distributes gifts according to His purpose. So we are accountable to Him to use the gifts that He has given as He directs. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no distinction in the New Testament between so-called "clergy" and "laity." It is true that some may be supported so that they can work full time in various ministries (1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Some are given leadership gifts to equip the rest of the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). But every Christian is "in the ministry" in the sense that every Christian has a spiritual gift and will give an account to God for how he uses it.

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus pictured a man about to go on a journey who entrusted five talents to one slave, two to

another, and one to yet another. A talent was a measure of money, not an ability to do something special. The man with the five talents went and traded with them and gained five more. The man with the two talents did the same and gained two more. But the man with only one talent hid the money until the master returned and gave him back his one talent. The master called that servant a wicked, lazy slave and ordered that he be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If the one talent guy had used the talent to gain another one, he would have shown that he was a true servant of his master. He would have faithfully used what the master gave him. But by not using it at all and spending his time on his own selfish pursuits, he showed that he was not a true servant. So each of us needs to ask ourselves: what gifts has the Lord given to me and how does He want me to use them for His kingdom purposes?

## II. Every Spiritual Gift comes from Jesus (vv.8-10).

### A. An Old Testament Comparison – a King Gives Gifts (v.8).

Verse 8 is a reference to Ps.68:18. It teaches us how Jesus earned the right to give believers spiritual gifts. In the Old Testament it reads, **“You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.”**

Psalm 68 is a hymn of triumph praising God as He ascends up Mount Zion. This was pictured in David’s celebration of returning the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. So Paul takes this verse about the Lord as a victorious king leading His captives in triumphal procession, receiving gifts of honor and applies it to the victorious, ascended Christ in relation to His church. Psalm 68:18 in its context obviously refers to the Lord ascending and Paul applies it directly to Christ.

Now if you compare this with what Paul quotes you will notice a change. Paul changes one key word, “received,” to “gave.” The picture is of a victorious warrior, receiving spoil after his victory and then distributing that spoil as gifts to his people.

When a king was victorious in battle, he would lead a grand parade through the streets. In the parade would be those who had been POW’s. The king had liberated the prisoners or captured those in **“captivity.”** He would also bring the spoils of war to share with the people.

### B. A New Testament Reality – The King gives Gifts (vv.9-10).

Verse 9 tell us that Jesus **“ascended”** after He had **“first descended.”** This pictures Him as the triumphant King of Glory returning from defeating the forces of hell on earth carrying with him the trophies of His victory.

Through His perfect life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, Jesus conquered Satan, sin and death. He **“led captivity captive,”** those who were once imprisoned by Satan, but now have been set free.

Upon returning to heaven, Jesus, the conquering King **“gave gifts to men.”** After Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Comforter, the Holy

Spirit to indwell the hearts of men. With the Spirit came the gifts of the Spirit or spiritual gifts.

The phrase "**descended into the lower parts of the earth**" is seen in contrast to the fact that Jesus "**ascended far above all the heavens.**" As Jesus explained to Nicodemus (John 3:13), "**No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man.**" Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven to this earth, sent by the Father (see John 6:33, 38, 51, 58). So when He ascended into heaven, Jesus was returning to the place where He dwelled before the foundation of the world (John 6:62). Jesus condescended to the womb, to the earth, and even to the grave. And for this God has highly exalted Him.

The point is, because of Jesus humble sacrifice of Himself on our behalf, He has been exalted "**above all the heavens**" and now has the authority to "**give gifts to men.**" He has earned the right to rule over His people and to gift His people "**that He might fill all things.**"

Jesus' filling all things, refers to His sovereign rule over all. Back in chapter 1:20-21, Paul states that after God raised Jesus from the dead, He was seated in heaven, far above all rule and authority. He then adds (1:22-23), "**And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**"

As we live in submission to Jesus' lordship, the world gets a glimpse of that future day when He will reign supreme. The world should see in the church a display of that yet future kingdom, when He will rule over all as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:15-16). As we exercise the spiritual gifts that the ascended, victorious Savior has given to us, we help to extend His sovereign rule over all before He comes to reign supremely.

### **III. Every Church is gifted with Spiritual Leaders (v.11).**

Jesus not only gives gifts to each individual believer, but also to His combined Body. To each believer He gives divine abilities, to the church in general He gives gifted men as leaders. We see four of them listed here.

#### **A. First, there were Apostles.**

The word "**apostle**" means "one who is sent with a commission." Jesus had many disciples but selected 12 "**apostles.**" A disciple was a "learner" or follower, a student of a teacher. An "**apostle**" was a divinely appointed messenger or representative.

The apostles had to be taught personally by the Lord and be witnesses of His resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor.9:1-2). Their teaching from the Lord became "**the foundation**" upon which the church is built (2:20). Miraculous signs and wonders that authenticated their message often accompanied their teaching.

There was no succession of apostles and therefore there are no apostles today. In fact, we don't find the word used in Acts after 16:4. There is no record of any of them being replaced. Once they laid "**the**

**foundation"** they fulfilled their task. Thank God for the ministry of the apostles!

## B. Second, there were Prophets.

**"Prophets"** were not necessarily those who foretold the future, but those who told forth the truths of the Word of God. During the time before the completion of the NT, they were second only in importance to the **"apostles."**

They sometimes gave direct revelation from God and sometimes expounded revelation already given. Though they were similar to the **"apostles"** it seems that their ministry was more local while the ministry of the **"apostles"** was broad ranging.

Again the church was **"built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets"** but once the foundation was laid, their ministry was finished.

As Wiersbe says, **"Christians today do not get their spiritual knowledge *immediately* from the Holy Spirit, but *mediately* through the Spirit teaching the Word."**

## C. Third, there are Evangelists.

The name **"evangelists"** and the word "evangelism" come from a word which means "good news." An evangelist is one who is especially spiritually gifted to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that people receive salvation.

This is an on-going gift. There are many people alive today, perhaps some of you who are gifted in evangelism. Some evangelists speak to large audiences (i.e. Billy & Franklin Graham, Greg Laurie, Luis Palau, etc...) Some evangelize one on one.

How do we know who is an evangelist? We see people who have a special ability to make the gospel plain and simple. They are gifted to probe the heart, answer objections and encourage people to accept Christ. The proof of an evangelist is that they lead people to Christ.

Though some are especially gifted **"evangelists,"** all ministers are called to **"do the work of an evangelist"** (2 Tim 4:5). All believers are to evangelize, but some believers are especially gifted as **"evangelists."**

Share the gospel. Don't say it is not your gift. I am praying that God will raise up a number of **"evangelists"** here, men and women who will bring the people in to be taught.

## D. Fourth, there are Pastor-Teachers.

I always enjoy pointing out to the congregation that the Bible refers to we pastors as gifts to you! Do you think of us as gifts?

The absence of the word **"some"** before **"teachers"** indicates that the offices of **"pastors and teachers"** are in reality combined into one office with two ministries. The Greek structure suggests this as well.

The word **"pastor"** is another word for "shepherd." The local church is like a flock of God. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28, **"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the**

**church of God which He purchased with His own blood."** He said in 1 Pet.5:2 says, "**Shepherd the flock of God which is among you.**"

There are two other terms given in the N.T., which are equivalent to "**pastor**." The first is "**bishop**" which is from *episkopos*. It means an "overseer" or "guardian." Thus it refers to the pastor's management, leadership and oversight of the local body. The other term is "**elder**" from *presbuteros*, which basically referred to someone who was "aged" or "gray-haired," someone to be respected. The more gray hair I get the more I love that one!

The title pastor also suggests someone who is tender and gentle, one who can not only defend the sheep from predators but also lovingly care for them.

Sheep can only be healthy when they are fed. A church can only be strong when she is fed. Thus "**pastors**" are also to be "**teachers**" so that they may feed the people of God on the Word of God.

1 Tim.5:17 says, "**Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor** [lit. "labor to the point of exhaustion"] **in the word and doctrine.**"

All gifted teachers of the Word are not pastors but all pastors must be gifted teachers of the Word. One of the first qualifications for a pastor is that he be "**able to teach**" (1 Tim.3:2).

There is nothing that will take the place of dedicated, labor intensive teaching and preaching of the Word of God. Nothing will revive a dead church like a pastor who teaches the Word. Nothing will mature immature Christians like preaching the Word. Nothing will bring a church together in unity, nothing will spur a church on to greater challenges, nothing will move, motivate and shake the very foundation of the church like the Spirit-anointed, verse by verse preaching of the Word of God.

If I ever come to the place in my ministry where I stop studying and preaching the Bible word for word, fire me!

Entertainment, frills, social standing or religious substitutes will never replace the work of feeding the flock. Nothing can take the place of anointed preaching of the Word God by the power of the Spirit of God that will motivate and mature the People of God!

## **Conclusion: Three Parting Questions:**

### ***1. Do you know your spiritual gifts?***

There are gifts inventory tests, but most importantly the Spirit will lead you to do what He has gifted to do. Your spiritual gift is that which comes easy and natural without being self-serving.

### ***2. Are you exercising your gifts in ministry?***

If not, you are missing out on blessings and spiritual growth. Nothing is more rewarding than exercising your spiritual gifts. It is fulfilling your identity. You were born to it.

### ***3. Are you appreciative of God's gifts (pastors) to your church?***

Bishop Hall once wrote concerning spiritual gifts: **"As many vapors, rising from the sea, meet together in one cloud, and that cloud falls down divided into many drops, and those drops run together, making rills of water, which meet in channels, and those channels run into brooks, and those brooks into rivers, and those rivers into the sea: so it either is or should be with the gifts and graces of the Church. They all come down from God, divided separately as he wills to various Christians. They should flow through the channels of their special vocations into the common streams of public use for church or commonwealth, and ultimately return into the great ocean of his glory, from whence they originally came."**