

Spiritual Gifts for God's Glory and the Church's Good (Ephesians 4:7-11)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 22, 2012

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Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 4. We left off last time with the oneness and unity we share, like it says in the modern chorus:

We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord.
We are One in The Spirit, We are One in The Lord.
And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

*And they'll know we are Christians by our love, By our Love,
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

We will work with each other, We will work side by side.
We will work with each other, We will work side by side.
And we'll guard each man's dignity And save each man's pride.

“We will ... save each man's pride”? That's a different way than Christians used to sing, like in the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross ... my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.” Before the 1960s, Christians generally saw self-esteem, self-love, and pride as sins that deserve nothing but contempt, sins to guard *against*. That modern song says “we'll guard ... and save each man's pride” but that's the exact opposite of what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4 as he says we're one in the Spirit and the Lord. We look to Scripture, not psychology or songs for authority. I don't need my pride saved; pride is the great enemy to unity God must save me and you from!

Ephesians 4:2 says we must walk “**with all humility** [opposite of pride, first on list for preserving unity] ... ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and **one Spirit**, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ **one Lord**, *one faith, one baptism,* ⁶ *one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* ⁷ *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.* ⁸ *Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”* ⁹ *(Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?*

We'll stop there for now and see if we have time to get to v. 10-11. But it's important to see that our humility that this passage starts in v. 2 with, it's something that Jesus modeled for us in v. 9. From the highest heavens (v. 10), Christ descended to the lowest earth (v. 9); this should affect our lowliness (v. 2, Philippians 2 develops that further).

And as Paul begins to talk about spiritual gifts in v. 7, humility is essential, because as he says in v. 7 the gifts Christ gives are all of grace, not because we were good naturally, these are gifts of what we didn't have. They're supernatural gifts exceeding what we're good at naturally. Paul's getting ready to talk about specific gifts in v. 11, and the role each of us have in v. 12-16, but we need to keep in mind the gifts *given to us are not about us and not for us*, they are for *the good of others and for God's glory* in Christ's church.

3:21 *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.* ¹
Therefore I ... urge you ...

Now turn over to Romans 12, and I want you to see that what Paul is doing here, he does also in Romans; after chapters of doctrine he turns the corner with the same phrases in the same order and turns to the same subjects, because it's the same need in every church.

Romans 11:36 *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. 12 Therefore I urge you ...* [same Greek words, same order, as Paul does in Eph 3:21-4:1, and what does he urge the church, his brethren to do here?] ... *to present your bodies [plural] a living and holy sacrifice [singular] acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*

The context is worship as a church, many bodies presented to God for spiritual worship, but what's not always noticed about this verse is that it says we're to be *one* living and holy sacrifice. The idea is not individuals with our sacrifices (plural separate), the idea is all of us make up a living and holy sacrifice (singular together, as one). Our Christian culture puts a lot of emphasis on "personal relationship" but don't let individualism trump corporate religious worship. The unity of the body of Christ is emphasized here as a primary implication or application of God being glorified in all things, and in particular, in His church, just like in Ephesians 4.

Rom. 12:3 *For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think ...* [opposite of self-esteem idea "think more highly of self"]

⁴ *For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function [unity w/ diversity] ⁵so we, who are many, are **one body** in Christ, and individually members **one of another**. ⁶ Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly ...*

Notice the emphasis on grace in gifts, and the humility of mind:

¹⁶ *Be of the same mind toward one another* [some translations say "live in harmony with one another, how?"]; *do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.* [or "don't be wise in your own eyes, don't be proud"]

Even our faith is a gift in v. 3, and everything good we have is all of grace, as v. 6 says. In v. 7 we see the gift of service and the gift of teaching, and in v. 8 there's the gift of exhortation and the gift of leading and the gift of mercy. This isn't an *exhaustive* list of all gifts, it's a list of *examples* of ways God has gifted us in the church with *explanations* of the attitude in which they're to be carried out:

- end of v. 8 reminds those doing acts of mercy to do so with cheerfulness (like Ps 100:2 "*serve the Lord with gladness*")
- v. 8 also reminds leaders to be diligent as we lead

Before we go back to Ephesians, there are some other important things to keep in mind and in balance in studying spiritual gifts:

- we don't have to do a computerized study to figure out what God wants us to do and calls us to do in a local church – just read the Bible and obey: ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;* ¹¹ *not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;* ¹² *rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,* ¹³ *contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.* ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.* ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep ...* ²⁰ *"BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK..."*
- we're all commanded to do all those things, and as we do those things, some of us will find greater giftedness in one area more than others, some will gravitate more to some of those things than others, but all of us must do all of those things. The same things called "gifts" we're all called to do
- In v. 7 there's a gift of service, but service is for all in v. 11 whether we "the gift of service," we all must still serve
- In v. 8 there's a gift of exhortation or encouragement, but in v. 15 we're all to encourage others and rejoice with them
- In v. 8 there's also a gift of giving (some more generous or joyful in it than others) but of us are to give to needs, v. 13

- It's not just those with the gift of leadership who are to be "diligent" in v. 8, all of us are to be "diligent" in v. 11
- There's a gift of mercy (v. 8) but all must show mercy (20)
- Some may be more compassionate than others but all should compassionately weep with those who weep (v. 15) and all should be "kindly affectionate" (v.10 says in NKJV)
- Some may have be more gifted in discernment than others but v. 9 says we're all to discern what's evil and to hate it and to love what is good (which also takes discernment)
- Some may have a gift of leading, like v. 8, but all of us are to be able to lead someone to Christ. Some may be more gifted "evangelists" (as Paul will talk about in Ephesians) but all of us are called to do the work of an evangelist. We can't just say "I don't have the gift of evangelism so it's ok if I don't." Did you know the word "evangelism" is not in the Bible? Strictly speaking a "gift of evangelism" is not in the Bible, it only mentions an "evangelist" one time (Acts 21, Philip) but "the work of an evangelist" is in 2 Tim. 4:5
- The same is true of hospitality in v. 13. The NT doesn't call it a gift. You say "I don't have the gift of hospitality..." but hospitality is *given to all to do* (v. 13) it's not *a gift to some* (there's no church office like 'evangelist' for 'hospitalitist')
- *There is a gift of teaching*, like in v. 7, but Jesus taught all of us in the Great Commission to be "*teaching all that I commanded you*" (at least one-on-one discipleship level). We're all to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 1:28, 3:16) to teach our children (Deuteronomy 6:7) and older women are to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5), it's not just for "super-Christians, super-parents, super-woman"
- **Caution: make sure you're in the Word (v. 2) before v. 6ff*

You can go back to Ephesians 4 now with what I hope is a fuller picture of spiritual gifts, which is the focus of Eph. 4:7-16. God has given gifted people to the church, not to do biblical commands *for you so that you don't have to*. He gives some gifts for greater effectiveness and blessedness in certain areas to help you, to equip you to do those things God calls you to that they're more gifted in, to learn from them. Their gifts are also to equip you to use yours:

Eph. 4:7 *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift ... ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service* [or ministry, we'll unpack that in the weeks ahead, this passage and paradigm. Look down at v. 16] *... from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

We'll get to the body metaphor when we get to those verses, but another way to look at this is a massive canvas with many painters with different parts in God's *multi-colored work of art* (2:10, 3:10).

Some talk about "finding your spiritual gift" (singular) but I think it's better to think not of "a gift" *like one present to find under the tree*, but to think of "giftedness" *like a palette* with multiple colors you have, but some colors are stronger on yours than on others. That doesn't mean you should only use your strongest colors but *some colors for you make more of an impact than others* in the section that's your part, and you have a special contribution and place in the overall canvas, and others can help fill in where weak. The end result of Christ's work in the church is glory/beauty (5:26) as God's tapestry masterpiece reflects and gives Christ glory (3:21)

It's a beautiful picture with different strokes, different folks, many brushes, many shades and saints God intentionally mixes together. We have a unity in that we're all part of the project and painting (4:4-6) but in v. 7-16 he moves from our unity to our diversity. The unity is not uniformity; there is a wonderful diversity in the church.

We are all one as believers in the truths of v. 4-6, but we're not all one person, one personality, or in one particular role in the church. If we were all the same, the picture would be very drab and dull without color, contrast. It's intentional that we're not all identical. We have the same Lord, faith, etc., but we're not all exactly the same in other areas, and that's by God's design and for His glory.

Paul used the word "one" 7x in v. 4-6, now he says in v. 7 "*But to each one of us grace was given...*" (emphasis now each one of us). Grace by definition is undeserved, unearned, unmerited favor of God to each sinner that He has unconditionally chosen to give it to.

1:5 *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His **grace**, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His **grace***

*... 2:5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (**by grace** you have been saved),⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His **grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For **by grace** you have been saved ...*

Salvation is all of grace, none of man. It's a gift of God to man. And God also gives grace *to us* in gifts to give grace *through us*. There is a responsibility and stewardship of grace for others, too.

3:2 *if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you ...⁷ of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, **this grace was given, to preach ...***

4:7 *But to each one of us **grace** was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸ Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."*

When Christ ascended (in context of v. 11, ascension to heaven) it says He led *captives*? What does that mean and who are they? That language is from Ps 68:18 (you may want a finger there and here, if v. 8 is a different font or formatting it means it's OT quote). In ancient biblical times, when kings and armies were conquered, the victor would lead the host of captives in a train to make a public display of the disarmed army he triumphed over. Colossians 2:15 says at the cross, Jesus "*disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them ...*"

Look back at Ephesians 1:20 where it explains how He conquered His enemies at His resurrection and ascension on high to heaven:

²⁰ *which He brought about in Christ, when He **raised Him** from the dead and seated Him at His right hand **in the heavenly places**,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion [terms for demonic powers and forces of wickedness in Eph 6:12, here in Eph 1:22 the ascended King Jesus has all subjected under His feet]*

In the context of Psalm 68, God as King conquers His enemies and

- God leads out the prisoners into blessing (Ps 68:6)
- God leads a procession as King "into the sanctuary" (v.24)
- God is then pictured in the highest heavens (Ps 68:33)
- God on high gives strength and power to people (v. 35)

In Eph 4:8, Paul uses the context of Ps 68 by analogy, application:

- Jesus is God and King, conquering enemies, setting us free
- Jesus is God and King also leading a triumphal procession
- Jesus is God and King who ascends from earth to on high
- Jesus from there also gives strength, power to His people

Jesus as God empowers His people by giving them spiritual gifts. As the King in Psalm 68 leads the procession, gifted musicians and singers follow, and the whole congregation is called to praise Him (Ps 68:24-26), in a similar way King Jesus led His procession, and has gifted us to serve and worship Him, as the whole congregation.

And just as Psalm 68:5-6 calls God “*Father of the fatherless...God sets the lonely in families*” (NIV, ESV “*settles...in a home*”) God in Christ has adopted us spiritual orphans, children of wrath (Eph. 2:3, 1:5), and has brought us into His home and household (2:19) and made us part of His forever family. And just as Psalm 68 has the victorious Lord going into His dwelling, the sanctuary/temple (v. 24), the church of Jesus is His new dwelling/temple (Eph 2:22).

And just as Ps 68:31-32 promises people from distant nations will come to stretch out their hands in submission and worship to God, it even singles out black Cushites/Ethiopians deep in the heart of Africa, Jesus in the first century had worshippers of every tribe and tongue and color and country and culture together in His church to worship Him in unity amidst all their wonderful diversity (Eph 4). And this unity with diversity is displayed in the gifts Jesus gives.

When the end of Eph. 4:8 Christ “*gave gifts to men,*” that’s not a word-for-word quote from Ps 68:18 (the Hebrew text says the Lord “*received gifts among men*” rather than “*gave gifts to men*”). But if you read the context of Psalm 68, the Lord receives *and then gives* to His people from on high (68:35), acting *on behalf of* His people (v. 28). Jesus as Conqueror *received gifts in order to give gifts* to the soldiers under Him, which a good general often did in ancient times. In fact, just a few verses earlier than the verse Paul quotes from in Ps 68, it talks about dividing the spoil after victory (v. 12). The spiritual riches Christ won are shared with us (Eph 1:3, 7, 18). Also in John 17, what the Son receives He gives to us/

John Stott writes: ‘It seems possible that the Hebrew text itself may imply this, since the verb could be translated ‘brought’ rather than ‘received’ ... two ancient versions or translations ... render it ‘gave’. So evidently this was already a traditional interpretation.

One other interesting point needs to be made. Liturgical custom in the synagogues associated Psalm 68 with Pentecost, the Jewish feast commemorating the giving of the law. Paul’s use of it in reference to the Christian Pentecost then makes a remarkable analogy ... Christ received ... and gave ... to his people in order to write God’s law in their hearts and through...pastors he appointed [Eph 4:11] to teach them the truth ... in Acts 2:33... Peter on the day of Pentecost said: ‘Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having *received* from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit; [Jesus] has *poured out* [*given*] this which you see and hear’¹

As the gift of tongues or languages was given at Pentecost, Psalm 68, which Jewish synagogues would read that time of year, Psalm 68 was being fulfilled in their hearing. The ascended Lord *received and then gave* spiritual gifts to men (Psalm 68:18). And another part of Psalm 68 was also fulfilled at Pentecost, the nations that v. 31-32 says would worship the Lord, that happens at Pentecost for even people from nations in Africa and others coming to Christ. The ascended Messiah on high sees many bow low in repentance.

¹ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society : The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 157-58.

Ephesians 4:9 goes on: “*He ascended,*” what does it mean except that *He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?*

I think this is talking about the incarnation, Jesus coming to earth, before He ascended back to heaven after completing the work of redemption on the cross. God gave His only Son as a gift, who descended from heaven above to earth below for our salvation.

John 3:13 has similar language: “*No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man ...*”¹⁶ “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*”

In Isa 44:23 “lower parts of the earth” is a simple way to say *earth* in contrast to *heaven* or to contrast lower earth with the mountains:

Shout for joy, O heavens ...

*Shout joyfully, you **lower parts of the earth**;*

*Break forth into a shout of joy, you **mountains** ...*

“Lower parts of earth” there means low lands/valleys of the earth. Figuratively when Messiah comes, the mountains were to become low parts of the earth (Isa 40:3, lofty things of this world were to be brought low in humility is the idea). And the Messiah Himself, in Zech. 9:9 literally comes “*lowly*” on earth to Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. This King would descend in every way as He came as He became flesh and dwelt among us, born of woman, Emmanuel.

“Lower parts of the earth” in the Psalms is used poetically also of a woman’s womb (Psalm 139:15) and it’s used of death or the grave (63:9, only 2 occurrences in Psalms). Jesus experienced both, in His descending, condescending from the highest heaven to lowest earth, from the womb to the tomb. He humbled Himself, starting with His lowly birth in a manger and ending with His execution in the lowest possible way, Phil. 2 says, “even death on a cross.” He came all the way down so He could bring us all the way up to Him.

His body was buried in the earth in a tomb, as He said in His own words, He would be 3 days “*in the heart of the earth*” (Mt 12:40).

But He didn’t stay there! On Sunday, the earth shook and angels rolled away the stone of the tomb, not because Jesus needed help getting out, Matthew 28 says they did it to show He’s not there! As resurrected Lord, the grave couldn’t hold Him, the earth couldn’t keep Him under, the whole earth is under Him, as Psalm 2 says of the Son, the earth is His footstool (Acts 7:39). He is now the One Revelation 1:5 calls “ruler of the kings of the earth” and Rev. 20 says “heaven and earth fled” before Him on His great white throne.

Philippians 2 says King Jesus “*emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave [that’s how far He descended] ... as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and **on earth and under the earth**, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God ...*”(7-11)

Look back at Ephesians 1:22: *And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,*²³ *which is His body, **the fullness of Him who fills all in all.***

In Christ ‘*all the fullness of deity dwells bodily*’ (Colossians 2:9 says) and here the fullness of God is manifested in the church as the body of this Christ in whom God’s fullness dwells! The church is His body, it’s the place where God manifests His fullness, Him who fills all in all. God’s fullness and glory dwells in the church!

2:21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

He's talking about the church, God's household (v. 19b), the house God builds spiritually. God's glory in the OT dwelt in a physical temple; now in the NT His glory and special dwelling is the church - not a physical building, but the spiritual body of believers/saints gathering corporately for worship and the Word as a true church.

In 3:18 Paul prays "*that you may be able to comprehend **with all the saints** [corporate/together] what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*" 3:21 "*to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus ...*"

As we gather with all the saints in a local congregation the love of Christ is manifested in a special way in that church body and the fullness of God, His glory is manifested in a special way in church. In corporate worship and learning of Christ and serving His body, we're filled up to the fullness of God *in the church through the spiritual gifts He gives for His glory and for our good as a church!* To Him be glory in the church in Christ by His spiritual gifts (4:7).

By His grace and for His glory, Eph. 4:7-8 says our glorified Lord gives gifts to men, why? ¹⁰ *He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.* ¹¹ **And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,** ¹² *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;* ¹³ *until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*

This is massively significant. Our big God who fills this massive universe, through His Son who ascended far above the heavens, this massive God chooses for His fullness to dwell in the body of Christ. The fullness of God, the glory of Christ, is manifested in His church through the spiritual gifts He gives to the church. The fullness of Christ (v. 13) manifests in gifted people in v. 11 and 12.

As the leaders fulfill their gifting in service in v. 11 and as all the church fulfills their gifting in service in v. 12, the body is built up. And in v. 13 as that happens, we grow in unity and community as we use the diversity of our gifts, and we know Jesus more as we grow in spiritual maturity. The end result: Christ's fullness, glory! We're going to get into the details of v. 11 and following in future messages, but I wanted us to first have that big picture of our big God and to see what a big a deal the church is to Christ and to see that something much bigger than us is at stake in spiritual gifts. If you look over at 1 Peter 4 the same big ginormous massive motive is to guide and govern spiritual gifts: *the glory of God*. God doesn't give us gifts so we will look good for feel good ... but to be good stewards of them *for the good of others by His grace, for His glory*

1 Peter 4:10 *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* ¹¹ *Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

We'll close with 1 Cor 12, the longest discussion of gifts in the NT on how the diversity is for unity and the good of others in the body

1 Cor 12:4 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

⁵ *And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.* ⁶ *There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. [same order as Eph 4:4-6]* ⁷ *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good** ...*

Then after discussing spiritual gifts for 20 verses Paul gives the goal in v. 25: ... *so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have **the same care for one another**.*

14:12 *So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound **for the edification of the church** ...* ¹⁷ *For you are giving thanks well enough, but **the other person is not edified** ... [end of v. 26 says as the church] ... **Let all things be done for edification.***

That's the foundation and framework we needed to lay: *spiritual gifts are given by God's grace, for His glory, and for the good of His church.* Next week we'll look at the gifts Christ gave the 1st century church in Ephesians 4:11 (apostles, prophets, evangelists) and the gifts He gives to every true church today (pastors and teachers) and what their purpose is in the local church and what your purpose is and how that fits into this overall purpose of God.