

Unity in the Body of Christ

The Measure of Christ's Gift

Ephesians 4:7-10

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The Measure of Christ's Gift

Scripture

We are currently in a series of sermons in Ephesians 4:1-16 that I am calling, "Unity in the Body of Christ."

In the first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul set down a number of glorious doctrines about predestination, election, adoption, redemption, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the work of God in joining people from all nations into the one body of Christ. Now, in chapter 4, the Apostle Paul moves into the application section of his letter to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 4:1-6, he explains that a healthy church—made up of healthy Christians—is marked by spiritual unity. Now, as he moves into the next few verses, he says that a healthy church—made up of healthy Christians—is marked by spiritual diversity. And he begins by teaching about the spiritual gifts that Christ has given to each one of us.

Let's read about the measure of Christ's gift in Ephesians 4:7-10:

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

**"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men."**

⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)
(Ephesians 4:7-10)

Introduction

Several years ago *USA Today* reported that one in five gift-card recipients never used their cards in 2005, representing about \$972 million in unredeemed cards. According to *Consumer Reports* National Research Center, the top reasons for not using gift cards:

- Didn't have time: 50 percent.
- Didn't find anything they wanted: 37 percent.
- Lost the card: 14 percent.
- Card expired: 12 percent.¹

Most of you have probably received a gift card. In fact, you probably have received several gift cards over the years. Have you ever not used a gift card? According to *Consumer Reports*, there is a high likelihood that you have not used a gift card that you have received. What a waste!

Paul teaches that Christ has given spiritual gifts to each believer. Sadly, a number of believers do not use the spiritual gifts that have been given to them. In the next few weeks, we shall learn about spiritual gifts, and how not to waste them.

Lesson

Ephesians 4:7-10 teaches us that Christ has given spiritual gifts to each believer.

Let's use the following outline:

1. To Whom Are Spiritual Gifts Given? (4:7)
2. From Whom Are Spiritual Gifts Given? (4:8-10)

¹ Craig Brian Larson and Phyllis Ten Elshof, *1001 Illustrations That Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2008), 339.

I. To Whom Are Spiritual Gifts Given? (4:7)

First, to whom are spiritual gifts given?

In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul stressed the unity we have in a healthy church. He wrote, “There is *one* body and *one* Spirit—just as you were called to the *one* hope that belongs to your call—*one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” But this *unity* does not mean that the church is uniform. No. In fact, Paul now goes on to teach that there is *diversity* in a healthy church. So, Paul said in verse 7, **“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”**

I want to begin by focusing your attention on, **“But grace....”** Commentator John Stott is helpful here. He writes:

Verse 7 refers to Christ’s *grace* in bestowing different gifts. Although Paul does not here employ the term *charismata* for “gifts” (as he does in Romans 12:6 and 1 Corinthians 12:4), yet clearly it is to these that he is referring. For “grace” is *charis*, and “gifts” are *charismata*. Moreover, it is very important to understand the difference between them. “Saving grace,” the grace which saves sinners, is given to all who believe; but what might be termed “service grace,” the grace which equips God’s people to serve, is given in differing degrees *according to the measure of Christ’s gift* (verse 7). The unity of the church is due to *charis*, God’s grace having reconciled us to himself; but the diversity of the church is due to *charismata*, God’s gifts distributed to church members.²

Do you see what is being said here? Every person who

² John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 155–156.

becomes a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ has received and continues to receive a full and equal amount of God's saving grace. In addition, each believer receives what Stott calls a "service grace," the grace which equips each believer to serve, and that "service grace" is given in differing degrees to each believer **according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

John MacArthur notes, "We each have a **gift** that is measured out to us—with certain distinct capabilities, parameters, and purposes. Each of us is given a specific **gift** (singular) through which we are to minister in Christ's name."³ The Apostle Peter put it this way in 1 Peter 4:10, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." And the Apostle Paul put it this way to the Romans in Romans 12:4–6a, "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them."

There are actually several lists of spiritual gifts that are given in Scripture (cf. Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10). These spiritual gifts that are given to believers should not be thought of as a comprehensive or complete list. Rather, it appears to be a representative list of the kinds of spiritual gifts that God has given for the purpose of "building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). John MacArthur puts it this way:

The lists of specific gifts in Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, and Ephesians 4:11 are not narrow and strict delineations of the spiritual gifts. There is not, for instance, a

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 136.

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single kind of prophetic gift, teaching gift, or serving gift. A hundred believers with the gift of teaching will not all have the same degrees or areas of teaching ability or emphasis. One may excel in public teaching in the classroom or church. Another's teaching gift will be for instructing children, another's for teaching one-on-one, and so on. Each believer is given the measure of grace and faith to operate his gift according to God's plan. Add individual personality, background, education, influences in life, and needs in the area of service and it becomes obvious that each believer is unique.⁴

Moreover, each believer may possess a cluster of spiritual gifts. A believer with the spiritual gift of administration may also have a measure of teaching or mercy. There are almost a limitless combination of clusters that make each believer's spiritual gifts unique, like a snowflake or a fingerprint.

So, if you are a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, let me say as clearly as I can: *You have a spiritual gift* because **grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.** The question is: Are you using your spiritual gift? John MacArthur writes:

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.⁵

⁴ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 136.

⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 137.

II. From Whom Are Spiritual Gifts Given? (4:8-10)

And second, from whom are spiritual gifts given?

Paul said in verse 8, **“Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’”** Paul is loosely quoting Psalm 68:18 here in verse 8. John MacArthur writes about verse 8:

Psalm 68 is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate God’s conquest of the Jebusite city and the triumphant ascent of God (represented by the Ark of the Covenant) up Mount Zion (cf. 2 Samuel 6–7; 1 Chronicles 13). After a king won such a victory he would bring home the spoils and enemy prisoners to parade before his people. An Israelite king would take his retinue through the holy city of Jerusalem and up Mount Zion. Another feature of the victory parade, however, would be the display of the king’s own soldiers who had been freed after being held prisoner by the enemy. These were often referred to as recaptured captives—prisoners who had been taken prisoner again, so to speak, by their own king and given freedom.⁶

Paul is using the vivid picture in Psalm 68 to say that the Lord Jesus Christ, having won the victory over sin and death, the grave and hell, ascended on high to the Father and presented him all the elect for whom he had won this victory. And as part of his victorious ascension, he gave spiritual gifts to believers who had not yet died so that they could continue his ministry in the church. What a glorious picture!

Then, in verses 9-10, Paul clarifies and expands what he means when he writes, **“(In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the**

⁶ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 138.

lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)” There has been much written about is meant by **“ascended”** and **“descended.”**

It seems that Paul was thinking of Christ’s descent from heaven to earth with all that was involved in his incarnation, life, crucifixion, death, and burial, and of Christ’s ascent from earth to heaven with all that was involved in his resurrection, ascension and present session at his Father’s right hand. In short, Paul was talking about the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. John Stott put it this way, “What is in Paul’s mind, therefore, is not so much descent and ascent in spatial terms, but rather humiliation and exaltation, the latter bringing Christ universal authority and power, as a result of which he bestowed on the church he rules both, the Spirit himself to indwell it and the gifts of the Spirit to edify it or bring it to maturity.”⁷

John MacArthur sums it up this way, “Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:8–10 is to explain that Jesus’ paying the infinite price of coming to earth and suffering death on our behalf qualified him to be exalted **above all the heavens** (that is, to the throne of God), in order that he might rightfully have the authority to give gifts to his saints. By that victory he gained the right to rule his church and to give gifts to his church, **that he might fill all things.**”⁸

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4:7-10, let us use the spiritual gifts that Christ has given each one of us for building up the body of Christ to his glory.

⁷ John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 159.

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, 140.

In an article written for *The Gospel Coalition*, senior writer Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra writes about one of the most memorable sermons preached in our generation, which was preached almost 18 years ago, on May 20, 2000.

About 40,000 college students had arrived for the fourth Passion Conference, its first outdoors on a grassy field in Memphis. It was a day they wouldn't forget, one they describe with words like "special" and "holy" and "weight of glory." Even people who weren't there remember it because that day author and pastor John Piper gave his famous "seashells" sermon.

Piper encountered a number of problems. With no bathroom or food breaks scheduled—funneling 40,000 people through porta-potties and food tents at the same time would be a logistical nightmare—students were up and down all day, getting snacks or using the bathroom or stretching their legs.

"It was like a stadium full of football watchers who keep going to get hot dogs," Piper said.

But worst of all was the wind.

"Nine minutes in, half of my notes blew away," Piper said. Thankfully, it was the left-hand half, which he was finished with. "I don't know what I would have done if the right-hand notes had blown away."

For the next 27 minutes, he held down his remaining notes with one hand, making all of his gestures with his right arm. Piper, who moves both arms almost constantly when he talks, felt like he "had been split in half."

Piper began his message by saying, "You don't have to know a lot of things for your life to make a lasting difference in the world."

You don't have to be smart, or good-looking, or from a good family, he told them. "You just have to know a few, basic, glorious, majestic, obvious, unchanging, eternal things, and be

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gripped by them, and be willing to lay down your life for them.”

Five minutes in, he laid out the comparison nobody forgot:

Three weeks ago, we got news at our church that Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon. Ruby Eliason—over 80, single all her life, a nurse. Poured her life out for one thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the sick and the poor in the hardest and most unreached places.

Laura Edwards, a medical doctor in the Twin Cities, and in her retirement, partnering up with Ruby. [She was] also pushing 80, and going from village to village in Cameroon. The brakes give way, over a cliff they go, and they're dead instantly. And I asked my people, “Is this a tragedy?”

Two women, in their 80s almost, a whole life devoted to one idea—Jesus Christ magnified among the poor and the sick in the hardest places. And 20 years after most of their American counterparts had begun to throw their lives away on trivialities in Florida and New Mexico, [they] fly into eternity with death in a moment. “Is this a tragedy?” I asked.

The crowd knew the answer, calling out, “No!”

“It is not a tragedy,” Piper affirmed. “I’ll read you what a tragedy is.”

He pulled out a page from *Reader’s Digest*.

(“I don’t know where I got it, because I didn’t subscribe,” Piper remembers now. “I must have found it in a doctor’s office somewhere.”)

He read it to them:

“Bob and Penny... took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise

on their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells.”

“That’s a tragedy,” he told the crowd.

And there are people in this country that are spending billions of dollars to get you to buy it. And I get 40 minutes to plead with you—don’t buy it. With all my heart I plead with you—don’t buy that dream.... As the last chapter before you stand before the Creator of the universe to give an account with what you did: “Here it is, Lord—my shell collection. And I’ve got a good swing. And look at my boat.”

“Don’t waste your life,” he said, the words quietly tucked in before he barreled into another memorable anecdote, this one about a plaque in his home featuring C. T. Studd’s poem, “Only one life, twill soon be past / Only what’s done for Christ will last.”⁹

What are you going to say when you stand before the Creator of the universe to give an account with what you did: “Here it is, Lord—my shell collection. And I’ve got a good swing. And look at my boat”?

Sometimes people say, “I can’t serve in the church because I am retired; let the young people serve.” Or, “I am too busy; let others serve.” Or, “I am too young; let others serve.”

No, no! If you are a born-again believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have a spiritual gift because grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. There is no retirement in serving the Lord.

If you are engaged in ministry in the church, continue to play your part in building up the body of Christ. And if you are not currently engaged in ministry in the church, make a commitment to get involved today to serve the Lord. Amen.

⁹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/how-john-pipers-seashells-swept-over-a-generation/>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
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