

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

### **The Gifts for Maturity**

Last week we began looking at this passage by asking the question:

What "means" has Christ given to the church through which the Spirit might work to preserve the unity among us so that we might "grow up" or "mature" into the fully image of the mature man, Jesus Christ?

We noted that when Jesus Christ ascended into heaven he gave gifts to the body (to each one of us). These are Spiritual gifts in that the Spirit of Christ takes from all that Jesus has accomplished and through uniting us to Christ he makes the life of Christ flow through us as his instruments to produce the fruit of the Spirit. It is through this Spiritual union with Christ that the unity of the body is not only manifested but continues to unite us more and more until we all grow up into the full measure of Christ. But in order to help the body grow, the Spirit produces gifts in accordance with the measure of Christ's gift to help the body grow more and more into the full image of Christ. The whole body is gifted; each member of the body has received these Spiritual gifts as the priesthood of all believers.

But now, in **vv. 11-15** Paul shifts from his previous focus upon the gifts of the whole body in **v. 7** to those particular gifts of ministers that are given to reveal, declare, and teach the gospel of Christ so that the whole body may be build up in the faith, what we might call the ministry-proper. As the ministers of the church, who are stewards of the mysteries of the gospel, proclaim and teach the gospel of Christ, the body is matured in the doctrines of the one faith so that they are no longer children who are easily deceived but they are matured and strengthened through the means of grace so that they can now use their individual gifts to contribute to the building up of the body of Christ (**v. 16**). The whole body must be built up on a correct, or orthodox proclamation of the gospel so that the whole body is built correctly. This ministry of the teaching of the gospel (which necessarily includes also the sacraments as the visible preaching of the gospel) originated in the ministry of Christ as the chief Shepherd of the flock of God. This ministry was then passed down to the apostles and prophets of Christ who with Christ form the unique, once and for all foundation of the church (**cf. 2:19-22; 3:4-10; cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; 2 Cor. 4:1-2**). Once that apostolic foundation has been laid, no other foundation of continuing or special revelation needs to be added. It is a perfect and sufficient foundation upon which the whole household of God is being built. Jude wrote the church:

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints (**Jude 1:3**).

It was this one faith (common salvation) once for all delivered to the saints that the early church began to meet together to study. In **Acts 2:42**, Luke gives the church a basic summary of the early church's worship:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The early church gathered regularly to devote themselves to study the apostles' teachings and to administer the Lord's Supper with prayer and fellowship. Christ laid the foundation of the ministry which including his own teachings (**Matt. 28:19-20** -- "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;" and **Acts 1:8** "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth.") It was to the apostles and prophets that Jesus promised:

The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you . . . When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you (**John 14:26; 16:13-14**).

These are the first two gifts or offices that Paul mentions in **v. 11**. While they were present in Paul's day, once they laid that unique, revelatory foundation they completed their work so that today we are no longer dependent upon new apostles and prophets who continually receive new revelation but we are built upon the teaching ministry which declare and teach the apostolic faith once for all delivered to the saints. We can see clearly in the New Testament that once the apostles and prophets were completing their foundational work they placed their hands upon pastors-teachers who would carry on their work of ministry until the return of Christ. Their ministry was passed on to those who were given to the church as pastors/teachers who came before the congregation with apostolic authority. The primary difference between the two groups of gifts or offices is that since the former were foundational and revelatory then their ministry was joined with all sorts of signs and wonders so that their ministry was extraordinary for the church. However, now that that foundation has been laid once for all then the ministry of Word and sacraments continues as the ordinary ministry of the church where the Spirit continues to work through the teachings of Christ and the apostles and prophets given to build up the church in Christ. It is now through the ordinary means of grace (the Word preached, baptism and the Lord's Supper administered) that the Spirit works to build up the saints into the fullness of Christ.

Therefore, though Paul mentions 4 or perhaps 5 gifts or offices in **v. 11**, two of those offices have now ceased with the finalization of the canon of Scripture which came about through the death of the last apostles and prophets in the first century of the church. This leaves 2 or possibly 3 offices in the ministry. The office of the evangelist continues today as missionaries throughout the world proclaim the gospel and plant new churches in areas where the name of Christ has not been named. Once those churches are established with their own elders and deacons then the evangelist will usually place a new pastor in that congregation and then move on to a new field.

The pastor fills the same office of the church but is given to build that church up in the faith until that particular congregation reaches the fullness of the mature man, Christ Jesus. Along with the pastor, Paul also mentions the teacher. This may in fact be the same office of "pastor-teacher" but the Reformed church has tended to separate these two offices to speak of the pastor of a particular church and teachers who may work in a seminary-type setting to train and equip new ministers for other churches. If this office is in fact a distinct office, as Calvin referred to them as "doctors" of the church, then it is clear that the office of teacher is also given to the whole body of Christ and is responsible to work to build up the body of Christ. One possible way in which seminary professors might be of greater use to the body of Christ is to give them the responsibility to oversee the doctrine of the church in the various Bible studies, catechizing of children, etc. to be sure that the once-delivered faith is being taught correctly. Also, he would be instrumental in preparing the curriculum of the church and testing the doctrine of the music of the church.

Now that we have discussed "what" Christ has given to the church, we need to turn and look more closely and "why" Christ has given the teaching ministry to the church.

In **vv. 12-15**, Paul explains the purpose of the teaching ministry of the church and the result of that particular work when it is performed well. In v. 12, Paul gives us a threefold description of the work of the teaching ministry of the church. First, the work of the minister is "the equipping of the saints." Secondly, it is to do the "work of service" or ministry. And finally, it is to build up the body of Christ. Each of these descriptions parallel one another to emphasize that the teaching ministry of the church is to serve the body so that they are equipped and built up or encouraged in their particular service to the Christ.

Remember that Paul has already mentioned in **v. 7** that each member of the church is gifted by Christ's grace. But how is each member equipped and encouraged to serve their Lord in using their particular gifts of service? By being taught the doctrines of the faith once delivered to the saints. Notice Paul's focus in **vv. 14-15** on doctrine.

In **v. 14** Paul mentions the negative result which will come about if the orthodox faith is not properly taught. If the body of Christ is not taught the gospel of Christ then they will remain like children who are tossed here and there by every wave and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming. Paul saves his harshest words for those who teach and preach a different gospel. Paul told the Corinthians:

But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of *devotion* to Christ. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully . . . For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is

not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds (**2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15**).

Paul saw at the heart of those deceitful workers, who were servants of Satan, that they were trying to lead Christ's sheep astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ alone. If the saints are not equipped and built up in the gospel then they are likely to be carried away from simple faith in Jesus Christ alone.

But the flip side of this is when the truth of the gospel is proclaimed in love the body grows up in every aspect of their lives into the fullness of Christ. This is the goal of the teaching ministry of the church. As the Word is preached and the sacraments are administered then the body is built up in loving truth or the truth taught in love "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 (**v. 13**). It is the chief end or goal of the ministry to teach the truth of the gospel of Christ in love for the body for which Christ died and purchased with his own precious blood until that body grows up into the mature man, Jesus Christ. He is the head of the church who fits and holds the whole body together. Paul told the Colossians, "hold fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grows with a growth which is from God" (**Col. 2:19**). You have died and your life is hidden in Christ so that as Christ, who is the head of the church, supplies life to the body through the Word and sacraments then the whole body is being built up in Christ.

Notice in **v. 16** Paul returns to the individual gifting of each member of the body. It is only as the whole body receives the life of Christ through the means of grace (the preached Word and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper) that "each individual part" is supplied with the life of Christ. As each individual part is built up then they then use their gifts ("the proper working") for the benefit of the whole body. When this happens, then the whole body is built up and growing as it should in love.

Note the clear theme of unity and love throughout this first section of **chap. 4**: We have been united to Christ Jesus, into whom we have been rooted and grounded in love and through which we are to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love for us. This Spirit produced unity is our bond of peace that we are to be diligent to preserve by showing tolerance for one another in love. In order to preserve this unity until the whole body grows up into the mature man, Jesus Christ has given to the church the ministry of the Word and sacraments so that through speaking the truth in love which causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Truly as Christ commissioned his church:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (**John 13:34-35**).

**Amen!**  
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