

Your Spiritual Gift:

A Tool to Build the Body of Christ

So we're in Ephesians chapter four from verse number seven to verse 16.

Here, Paul moves from what all believers have in common to how they differ. He's discussing variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. It says there in Ephesians 4:7

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift. And this gift is to be used for the unifying and the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ. There's a significant difference between spiritual gifts and natural abilities. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other believers so that Christ is always glorified and believers are encouraged and built up.

How does a believer discover and develop his gifts? By fellowshiping with other believers in the body of Christ. Remember this; gifts are not toys to play with but tools to build with. If we don't use them in love, they become weapons to fight with, which is what happened in the Corinthian church.

God doesn't design believers to live in isolation. We need one another. Does a believer own his individual gifts? Well, yes, to the degree that God owns and controls him. It's God's gift to you, and that gift is your gift to us. Isn't that neat? What God gave to you, He expects you to use for other people.

But to each one of us, it says grace was given. God is gracious because of who He is, not who or what we are. His grace is, therefore, entirely dependent on the one who gives it and not on the one who receives it. His grace is unmerited, unearned, and undeserved. Aren't you thankful for the amazing grace of God?

God's grace is His self-motivated, self-generated, sovereign act of giving, according to the measure of Christ's gifts.

What is God's greatest gift of grace ever given us? That's easy. Himself. For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son. God gave himself. The incomprehensible and staggering truth of the gospel is that the Holy God of the universe has given himself to sinful mankind.

He not only gives men blessings but also blesses us with his presence. He comes to us and says to us individually; I want to enter into a personal, intimate relationship with

you. I want a fellowship with you. God does not owe men the smallest blessing or favor, yet he gives us everything as we enter a personal relationship with him.

I love Second Corinthians 8:9. It says:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

Today, we are wealthy through the grace of God. We are rich in the love of the Lord. This grace that God has given to each of us not only saves us but it enables us to make that extraordinary gift that he's given to us function for his honor and glory. He's not only the giver of the gift but the grace necessary to make it work.

He gave me a gift, and now he gives me the grace to help me operate in that gifting. In verses seven through 11, Paul first assures us that every believer has an individual gift. Then he shows us how Christ won the right to give us that gift.

Verse 8 says:

Therefore He says:

"When He ascended on high,

He led captivity captive,

And gave gifts to men."

This picture shows a military conqueror leading his captives and sharing the spoils with his followers. Only in this case, the captives aren't his enemies. They are his people, once held captive by sin, who have now been taken captive by Christ. Catch this. When Christ ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit also came his gifts to the Church. Jesus said, "I've got to go away, guys. I've got to go back to my Father, but I promise when I get there, and I'm seated once again on the throne, I will send you the promise of the Father. And Acts chapter two lets us know that Jesus made it safely back to heaven, that he's enthroned again at the right hand of God, the Father because the Holy Spirit fell. When the Holy Spirit filled them to overflowing, they received all kinds of spiritual gifts.

Verse nine says:

(Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

Peter gives us some insight into the meaning of this verse. In First Peter chapter three, verses 18 and 19.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,

Between Jesus's death on the cross and his resurrection in that garden tomb, He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit. He was physically dead but spiritually alive.

During the three days He was in that state, he also descended and proclaimed to the spirits now in prison. This doesn't refer to preaching the gospel but to making a triumphant announcement. In this case, he announced his victory over the power of hell, the devil, and all his demons. Because of the cross, He had disarmed the rulers and the authorities of darkness. He publicly displayed them according to the scripture, having triumphed over them.

Jesus descended before he ascended. He had some announcements that he wanted to make based upon the sacrifice that He had just made on the cross. He went down to notify Hell that they were finished. It was over. He had conquered, and He was the victor of all victors.

The Old Testament refers to the place of the departed dead as Sheol. Part of Sheol was a place of torment occupied by the unrighteous dead and demons. Another part of Sheol was believed to be a place of happiness and bliss inhabited by the righteous dead who believed in God in the Old Testament. This area was called Abraham's Bosom in Luke Chapter 16 and Paradise in Luke Chapter 23. These were typical designations for Sheol at the time of Christ.

Early church doctrine taught that God couldn't take the righteous dead of the Old Testament into the fullness of God's presence until Christ the Messiah had purchased their redemption on the cross. They had been waiting in this place for His victory.

We always think about the angels rejoicing when Jesus came out of the tomb on the third day. But I tell you, there was rejoicing in the lower parts of the earth. The early church fathers said that after announcing his triumph over demons in one part of Sheol, he took the keys, walked over, and opened the doors of another part of Sheol to release those godly captives like the victorious kings of old. He recaptured the captives, liberated them, and forever they would live in heaven as eternal, free sons of God. I believed in God in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, Jesus had not yet died. The gates of heaven hadn't been opened. Jesus would soon ascend back to the Father, but he would not go to heaven alone. He would lead a parade of Old Testament Saints of God.

Jesus Christ ascended into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit, and with the coming of the Holy Spirit, he gave spiritual gifts to men.

Christ not only gives gifts to individual believers but also gives five ministry gifts or offices to the church overall. You see them there in verse number 11.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

The purpose of these God-appointed leaders is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Isn't that what we pay the pastor or staff to do? The Saints don't call a pastor and pay him to do the work. They follow his leadership as he, through the word, equips them to do the job.

You are the saints of God. The leaders share in serving, and many of the congregation share in equipping, but God's basic design for the church is edifying the saints so they can serve each other effectively.

The entire church is to be passionately involved in the work of the Lord, equipping, working, and edifying one another. We all are working for the honor and the glory of the Lord.

The building of the saints involves a twofold ultimate objective, which Paul identifies here for us in verse 13.

till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

There can never be unity in the church without doctrinal integrity. Faith here doesn't refer to the act of belief but to the body of Christian doctrine. Faith is the content of the gospel. Disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity.

Oneness and fellowship are only possible if built on the foundation of commonly believed truth. When we come together, we've got to believe together. We've got to agree together. The solution to the division in Corinth was for everyone to hold the same understanding and opinion and to speak the same truth.

First Corinthians 110 says this:

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Paul is pleading with the Corinthians because there was division. They had all kinds of gifts, but they were not very loving. Your gifts are meaningless if you don't have love. Only a biblically equipped, faithfully serving, and spiritually mature church can come to the unity of the faith.

The second result of following God's design for building His church is attaining the knowledge of the Son of God. We're not talking about knowledge of salvation but the deep knowledge that comes only through prayer and faithful study of God's word.

Growing a deeper knowledge of the Son of God is a lifelong process that we won't complete until we stand before God face-to-face. There will never come a day in your life as a believer, as a child of God, where you say, I know everything there is to know about God.

I don't think I could get any closer to Jesus Christ than I am right now. God wants to show you something new about Jesus. He wants you to listen and learn, and He wants you to know the voice of Christ.

You cannot follow God faithfully if you don't know Him intimately.

Here's another result of following God's design for his church; sound doctrine. It's practical stability. That's what I love about God's Word. It's practical.

As it says in verse 14:

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Craftiness carries the idea of clever manipulation of an error made to look like truth.

It's a lie but disguised to look like the real deal. It is an intentional misleading. Someone is planning to deceive the Church and lead Christians away from the true gospel. Paul's point is that neither the trickery of men nor the deceitful scheming of the devil will mislead the spiritually equipped and mature believer. Believers who aren't anchored in God's truth are subject to every sort of counterfeit truth. They are in constant danger of falling prey to every new religious fad or novel interpretation of scripture that comes down the pike.

So much stuff can filter into the Church that has nothing to do with God or God's word. Immature Christians can be gullible.

In the Church's history, perhaps no group of believers has fallen into more foolishness than the generation of Christians today. There's some crazy stuff. You've seen it. You've heard it. Sound doctrine will enable you to spot a counterfeit gospel every time.

One final feature of following God's design is simply speaking the truth. Look at verse 15.

but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—

God is telling his children to grow up. Little children don't know how to blend truth and love. They think you have to shield someone from the truth if you love someone. It's a mark of maturity, a sign that we're growing up when we can share the truth with our fellow believers and do it in love.

The spiritually equipped church whose members are sound in doctrine, mature in their thinking and their living. That's a church that will reach out and proclaim the gospel beyond the walls into the community. God doesn't give us knowledge, understanding, gifts, and maturity to hoard. He gives those things to us to share.

He doesn't equip us to stagnate but to serve. We aren't gifted and edified to be complacent and self-satisfied but to do the work of the Lord in building up and expanding the body of Christ. God wants us to grow up as individual believers. And as we begin to mature, funny things happen to the church. The church begins to grow up as well.

Truth unites us. Lies divide us. That's what Paul is saying here. Love unites us. Selfishness divides us. Therefore, speaking the truth in love, let us equip one another and edify one another so that all of us may grow up to be more like Christ. Isn't that what we want? Don't we want to be like Jesus?

So let me sum this up for you, first of all. We need to be united in our faith, growing in our knowledge, sound in our doctrine, and truthful in our speech.

Being unified in our faith is what brings us together. We believe that the Bible teaches certain things, and we're going to stand on that. Those are our convictions. We have standards, and we hold to the fundamentals. We will not let go of them no matter what comes down the pike.

We will not water down the gospel. We won't do anything just to be user-friendly. There is a price to pay for following Christ.

Second, we should grow in our knowledge of Christ. Paul started one-third of the New Testament churches. Most of the epistles were written by him as he was facing death. He had this burning drive and desire to know Christ more.

Third, we need to be united in sound doctrine. Know what you believe. Counterfeits will come, but the light of God's word shines on those counterfeits, so we can recognize what's true and what is not.

Lastly, make sure you are speaking the truth in love. God helps us be truthful, honest, transparent, and care about one another. So when others go off the path, love them back in. Don't judge or criticize them.

We are blessed here. God is blessing us with one another in our fellowship.