

Last week we were exhorted to live a life worthy of the calling we have received in all humility and gentleness with patience. (4:1) We all have a common calling, to become the holy and blameless bride of Christ. We are all called to represent Christ's love in this world. In our passage today, Paul is going to explain how we also have a unique gift of grace. Though there is one body and one Spirit, and one hope to which we are called, one Lord, one faith and one baptism, (4:4-5) there are a variety of gifts and individual callings.

This is an area where young Christians often get sidetracked. When we surrender to the Lord and find the fullness of His life in us, the baptism of the Spirit, total surrender, sanctification, or whatever your denominational background likes to call it, we become excited about newness of relationship we have found. We want everyone to experience it in the same manner that we have. We think, "I found this exciting and enriching experience of praying in tongues. (or whatever gift you have) Everyone should experience what I am experiencing!" And so we go around telling people that they are really missing something because they don't have the same experience we have. We might even encourage them to just let their tongue go and make sounds. It is almost as if we want to authenticate our gift by seeing it in others. The emphasis of one gift over another can become a divisive issue. It is usually well intentioned, but spiritually incorrect.

The other side of the problem is when we are intolerant of the gift of others. We might tell that brother that speaks in tongues that he isn't experiencing what he thinks he is experiencing. (1Corinthians 14:2) Or we may ignore the gift of leadership, (Romans 12:8), or of mercy, or one of the other unseen gifts. Denying the gifts can be as damaging to a church as trying to insist that everyone have the same gift.

If you have received a deeper walk with the Lord by the gift of God's grace, remember it was nothing you did. (3:7) It was a gift. It came at the right time in your life. It came in a way that is unique to the gift God was giving you. This is what Paul is addressing in our passage today. The overemphasis of one gift over another was as much a problem then as it is now. Our unity is in the Lord who we worship, our faith in the work He accomplished, and the newness of life we have received. Our diversity is in the way we experience Christ and our particular gifting. Diversity is necessary for the richness of harmony. (1Corinthians 12:12)

It is something like a symphony. Our unity is in the fact that we are all playing the same score and following the same conductor, but each has a part and an instrument. There may be others that have the same part and instrument, but it is the various parts in harmony that bring out the richness and beauty of a symphony.

**Commented [notes1]: Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

**Commented [notes2]: Ephesians 4:4-5(ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call -  
<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

**Commented [notes3]: 1 Corinthians 14:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit.

**Commented [notes4]: Romans 12:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

**Commented [notes5]: Ephesians 3:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

**Commented [notes6]: 1 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

Here is how the Apostle expressed it. <sup>7</sup> *But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.* Let me share a few other paraphrase versions of this verse to help us understand it. Ephesians 4:7 (NLT) <sup>7</sup> *However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.* Ephesians 4:7 (MSG) <sup>7</sup> *But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift.* Paul stated the same idea to a church where certain gifts were emphasized and people were made to feel inferior because they didn't have them or didn't have them to the extent that others did.

Read [1 Corinthians 12:4-11 \(ESV\)](#)

Do you see the similarity with Ephesians 4:7? We have the one Spirit but different gifts and those gifts are distributed graciously by the Spirit according to the grace/generosity of Christ. We have to trust in the sovereignty of God. We must believe that He knows best. We are encouraged in Scripture to desire the best gifts ([1Corinthians 12:31](#)), but we are never exhorted to insist others have the same gift that we have. That is up to the Spirit. He knows what part of the body needs which gift.

It won't do my big toe much good to see, because it will either be covered by a shoe or keep getting dirt in it. If I keep trying to make my big toe feel guilty for not looking where it is going, I'll be excusing my eyes for not doing their job, while making my toe feel guilty for not doing something it was never intended to do. ([1Corinthians 12:17](#))

Instead of insisting others have our gift, we should look to see what gift God has given them and encourage them when we see it expressed. Appreciate the harmony they bring to the symphony we call the body of Christ.

If you are a believer and you don't know what your gift is, ask the Lord to show you. You can ask a trusted brother or sister in Christ who knows you well if they see a gift of the Spirit in your life. Don't be afraid to try new things at the Spirit's leading. Step out and you may discover that you have been given a gift you didn't realize you had. You'll notice that wind of the Spirit in your sails when you are exercising the gift God has given you.

Our gifts come from the generosity of Christ. We do not earn them or work them up. We just freely receive them and exercise them by faith. ([Romans 12:3](#))

<sup>8</sup> *Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."* Paul is quoting Psalm 68:18. He interprets this passage as meaning that Jesus conquered the spiritual powers that were trying to defeat Him. His ascension through the heavens showed they had no power over Him. In the letter to the Colossians we read, <sup>15</sup> *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.* Colossians 2:15 (ESV) Not only did Jesus conquer the spiritual enemies of God, but then He distributed to those whom he justified by faith the

**Commented [notes7]: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;  
<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;  
<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.  
<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.  
<sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,  
<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,  
<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.  
<sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

**Commented [notes8]: 1 Corinthians 12:31 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

**Commented [notes9]: 1 Corinthians 12:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?

**Commented [notes10]: Romans 12:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

gift of the Spirit with special gifts for each individual.<sup>10</sup> The enemy is defeated and the saints are equipped to continue the mopping up action by the gifts that Christ has generously given us.

*<sup>9</sup> ( In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?<sup>10</sup> He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)* Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven to earth. (John 6:42) I have met people in our town that make that same claim, however their life has no evidence of any special insight or power. They haven't raised the dead, told the future accurately, walked on water, or commanded nature. If Jesus didn't do those things we could dismiss His claims too. But He did and the world has been changed by His life, death, and resurrection which makes His claims something we better seriously consider.

Paul is saying that His ascension proves that He came from heaven. In fact, the verse from the Psalms that he is quoting is about the Lord and the following verse calls him **E/ Yeshua!** (Psalm 68:19) The translation is literally, "God Jesus!"<sup>13</sup>

Paul adds that Jesus ascended so that He might fill all things. When Jesus ascended, the author of Hebrews explains that Jesus presented His blood on the mercy seat in heaven so that between a holy, just God and His commandments that condemn us within the Ark of the Covenant is the blood that paid the penalty in our place. (Hebrews 9:11-12) This makes us fit vessels to receive the Spirit of God. Now for the first time in history, all who believe can be filled with the Spirit. When all His enemies are put under Jesus' feet, **He will fill all things.**

That is quite an expression! Who is Jesus? He is truth, life, light, love, goodness and we could go on and on with His wonderful attributes. (John 14:6) Those attributes will fill all things. There will be no more darkness and rebellion. Jesus through the Spirit will fill all in all. That is another way to describe heaven. It is a place where Jesus fills all things. I can only imagine! Just imagining what it would be like makes me long for it.

Let me state it again in a little different way because I think it is important for us to grasp this teaching. Jesus' ascension proves He came down from heaven. (John 3:13) He ascended to fill all things. He accomplishes this by first atoning for our sins with His own blood that we might be filled with the Spirit. He defeated His enemy, but we are doing the cleanup work by the power of the Spirit in us. When all things are completed and the final rebellion is squelched, Jesus' nature will fill everything! Goodness and righteousness and love will permeate all that is. That is what we call heaven.

Meanwhile, here we are, each with a common calling and each with a unique calling. We cooperate with the Spirit of God and usher in His kingdom through doing our part in the

**Commented [notes11]:** Paul uses the Aramaic version (Targum) rendering it "giving gifts" instead of "receiving gifts". Though quite different, both were done upon conquest which is the setting of the Psalm.

**Commented [notes12]:** John 6:42 (ESV)  
<sup>42</sup> They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven.'"

**Commented [notes13]:** Psalm 68:19 (ESV)  
<sup>19</sup> Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation.  
*Selah*

**Commented [notes14]:** Translated "God is our salvation" from two words: El = God and Yeshua = salvation - but also the Aramaic name of Jesus. No wonder the Hebrew reading Paul saw the passage in Psalms to be about Jesus.

**Commented [notes15]:** Hebrews 9:11-12 (ESV)  
<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent ( not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.

**Commented [notes16]:** John 14:6 (ESV)  
<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

**Commented [notes17]:** John 3:13 (ESV)  
<sup>13</sup> No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

body of Christ. The diversity of gifts creates a beautiful harmony, God's love song to the lost world.

*<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,* 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 give a list of different gifts that are expressed within the body. We often do what Paul warns us not to do, thinking less of the more modest gifts like mercy and service, but these are the most needed and therefore the most common. (1Corinthians 12:22-24) **Just because there is not a miraculous aspect does not mean that they are any less empowered by the Spirit.** I continually witness acts of mercy and service in this body of believers. Those acts are just as important as my gift of preaching. What would my preaching be if the body did not serve one another in love? There would be no evidence of the power in the Word!

Most of you give anonymously and do not want to be praised for your act of service. That is a testimony that it is from the heart for the glory of God. (Matthew 6:3-4) **I rarely boast about your service because you'd rather have your reward in heaven. (Matthew 6:1) Just because your gift is not exercised in the sight of others does not make it any less important.**

This church is alive with a variety of gifts, but many of them are in secret, which is just the way the Lord encouraged us to express those gifts of mercy and generosity. (Matthew 6:4) **Don't feel you are any less spiritual because your gift is unseen.**

In these last verses we are looking at today, Paul mentions the leadership gifts. Some have put these as a hierarchy in church structure; I personally don't see it as such. In Acts 13, those with these gifts prayed and together were led by the Spirit. They are simply leadership gifts that function together in building up the body and equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. To put them in a hierarchy goes against what Jesus said about all of us being brothers and not claiming titles. (Matthew 23:8)

Apostle was a role of an official representative. There were 12 apostles chosen by Jesus. Judas was replaced by the Apostle Paul.<sup>22</sup> These men were to convey the life of Jesus and be a witness of the resurrection. My personal conviction is that the role ended when John the Beloved died. However, some today give a church planter the label of apostle. I think that role fits more in the third category, Evangelist.

The gift of prophet is one that is also debated today. Some on the charismatic side of the church would equate it with the role of the Old Testament prophet and say that his words are to be heeded like Scripture, as if he spoke for God. The Apostle Paul said that others should judge any prophecy given as to how it aligns with the word of God. (1Corinthians 14:29; Isaiah 8:20) Since Jesus said the Law and the prophets were until John the Baptist (Luke 16:16), I see prophecy in the New Testament as one declaring just the right

**Commented [notes18]:** 1 Corinthians 12:22-24 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,

<sup>23</sup> and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,

<sup>24</sup> which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,

**Commented [notes19]:** Matthew 6:3-4 (ESV)

<sup>3</sup> But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,

<sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Commented [notes20]:** Matthew 6:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

**Commented [notes21]:** Matthew 6:4 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Commented [notes22]:** Acts 13:1-3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

<sup>2</sup> While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. E

<sup>3</sup> Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

**Commented [notes23]:** Matthew 23:8 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

**Commented [notes24]:** Matthias was chosen before the outpouring of the Spirit and Paul declares the Spirit chose him in Eph 1:1

**Commented [notes25]:** 1 Corinthians 14:29 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

**Commented [notes26]:** Isaiah 8:20 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

**Commented [notes27]:** Luke 16:16 (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> "The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and everyone forces his way into it.

Scripture at just the right time to a given group of people, not by his own insight, but simply because God has inspired it. There seemed to be an overlapping of Old Testament predicting of future events through prophets in the New Testament. (Acts 20:23) Was this an overlapping of the ages or does God still warn of future things through certain individuals today? Earlier in this letter, Paul told us that the foundation of the household of God is the apostles and prophets. (2:20) That would seem to imply to me that it is the foundation of the Scriptures that they delivered to us. We must each hold our own conviction in this regard, but be honest with the outcome.

If what a self-proclaimed prophet says does not come to pass or is too vague to judge, be truthful about it. I have offended many people by calling certain individuals false prophets. When someone says, "Thus sayeth the Lord" and it doesn't happen, face the facts! When someone claims to speak a word from God you must ask yourself if it rings true in your spirit, and if it aligns with the Word of God.

The evangelist is especially gifted in seeing souls turn to Jesus. They have an anointing that speaks right to the heart and brings people under conviction. We are all evangelists to some extent (Mark 16:15), but some are especially gifted for this task.

Finally, shepherds/pastors and teachers is the fourth gifting. Many call this the five-fold ministry, however, Greek scholars see the "and" in this last gift as tying the two gifts together.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that elders are to be able to teach. (Titus 1:9) The term elder is used interchangeably with shepherd in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5. An elder may have other gifts, but he should also be able to teach and have a shepherd's heart. They must know the word *and* care for the flock of God.

**All these leadership gifts are for equipping of the saints.** Through the exercise of their gifts, the rest of the body is equipped to use their gifts. (4:16) The Word shows us how to distinguish between flesh and spirit and thus equips every gifting. As the body is built up through these gifts, the body becomes healthier and more able to perform the various tasks that are given to it. The kingdom of God advances and grows when we are all serving in our various capacities. Last week I encouraged you to walk worthy of your calling with all humility and gentleness with patience. The Word washes and cleanses us and empowers us with conviction to walk in our calling. (5:26)

Some look at this church and think it is a quiet little church not doing much. From one on the inside who gets the privilege to see much of the work done quietly, I can tell you this church is alive and well. Could we be more passionate and more involved, of course! That's our goal. It is the elders' job to encourage you through the Word to give Jesus your best and equip you to be all He has planned for you to be.

We aren't a program driven church. We are a Spirit driven church through the Word. Keep growing and serving and loving and giving and being all God has called you to be. If you

**Commented [notes28]: Acts 20:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.

**Commented [notes29]: Ephesians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,

**Commented [notes30]: Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

**Commented [notes31]:** the ancients Chrysostom and Augustine translated it this way. - Preaching the Word - Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ.

**Commented [notes32]: Titus 1:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**Commented [notes33]: Acts 20:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.

**Acts 20:28 (ESV)** <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

**Commented [notes34]: 1 Peter 5:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

<sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

**Commented [notes35]: Ephesians 4:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

**Commented [notes36]: Ephesians 5:26 (ESV)**

<sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

know of some way we can equip you or build you up in your special calling, please let us know, for ...*grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

#### Questions

- 1 What are the two extremes in dealing with spiritual gifts?
- 2 What makes up a harmony?
- 3 What does verse 7 mean?
- 4 What verse does Paul cite?
- 5 What is the surprise in the next verse?
- 6 If the battle is won, why are we here?
- 7 Why does Paul believe Jesus came down from heaven?
- 8 What does it mean to "fill all things"?
- 9 What is the role of each gift in verse 11?
- 10 What is the purpose of these gifts?
- 11 What is our goal?