



Christ's Gifts to His Church

Series: The Grand Plan of the Glorious God

Ephesians 4:7-16

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Introduction In our study through the book of Ephesians, the resounding and overarching theme has been the greatness of God's grace to redeem for Himself, sinners and rebels and traitors from just condemnation for sin -- a people from every tribe and nation and tongue for God's own possession. Paul has shown us how the glorious God of the universe has purposed to make us no longer aliens but citizens in the Kingdom of God, no longer strangers but members in the household of God, living stones in the Temple of God -- His church. Throughout the entirety of this book, God means for us to be gripped by the greatness of God's glory and the wonder of His grace, to be spellbound by the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, what we cannot miss is this clear and overarching truth that the God of glory and of grace is for us; God is for His church and we are going to see that even more clearly today as we look at this text that is before us.

If you remember back a few weeks ago, we read Paul's exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of our calling as the church of the Living God, to walk in a manner that is consistent with our calling as the people of God, to walk in light of the grace that has been poured out on us to save us and make us the people of God. And one of the chief ways that we were to do so was to preserve the unity that we have as the people of God. Our calling as a church is to guard the unity that Christ has forged in His church by His blood. The unity of the church did not just happen -- the unity of the church is established at the cost of the blood of Christ and by the irresistible, mighty power of the Holy Spirit to bring men and women, boys and girls to saving faith in Christ.

United by the Spirit through the blood of Christ, we are **one body** with **one Spirit** sharing **one hope**. We have **one Lord**, Jesus Christ. We share **one faith**. We share **one baptism**. The baptism that sets us apart and identifies us as Christ's. And we have **one God and Father of us all, who is over all, and in all and through all**. Like we said a few weeks ago, there is nothing more glorious on this earth than a church living in unity, our hearts joined together to honor God and live for His glory. As we pick up the text in verse 7 this week, however, Paul wants to make sure that we understand that

1) The unity of the body of Christ is not uniformity, but unity amidst a diversity of gifts. (v. 7) Here Paul wants for us to see that our unity in Christ is not a matter of uniformity. We are not a cult. The goal is not a bunch of drab, cookie-cutter copies of one another that wear starched white shirts and black ties, abstain from caffeine and ride bikes everywhere we go. That is not the idea of the unity that has been forged by the blood of Christ. Though we are essentially one, we differ in many respects and that diversity does not do away with our unity but is in keeping with the plan and the pleasure of God. That is what Paul means when he writes: **But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Eph 4:7)**

Paul means for us to see that not only have we been saved by grace through faith in the completed work of Christ's sacrifice in our place on cross – His work as redeemer and as wrath bearer. He also wants us to see that by grace we have been the recipients of gifts of grace that have been given to us according to His measure. Not only has Christ saved us but He has given to us differing degrees of gifts, all out of His grace and all according to His sovereign plan.

Now, what are the gifts to which Paul is referring? Our immediate assumption is that Paul is speaking here of the gifts of the Spirit – those gifts that are listed in such texts as Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12. But it is important to know that the word that is translated as “gift” here is not the word used for the grace gifts, “charismata”. Instead it is a more general word for gift, the word “dōrea”. It can and does include the charismata, such spiritual gifts such as prophecy, serving, exhortation, teaching, generosity, discernment, mercy, administration and the like, but it also includes such things as intellect, health, skills, talents and abilities, strength and energy, wealth, influence, time, perseverance through trials and testings that build and strengthen our faith – all that and more are gifts from Christ by grace. It includes the gifts of common grace as well as the gifts of specific grace (the gifts of the Spirit) given to the church.

The key thing to see is that everything that we have been given has come from Christ and is to be used for the sake of His glory and for the good of His body. Every good thing that we enjoy has been given to us by God's grace in Christ and purchased for us by His blood. Every blessing proceeds from Calvary. Each of us has been given gifts in varying degree to be exercised and used for the sake of the church, a contribution to be made to the body which no other member is able to make. These gifts and the portion in which they are given to us make us different from one another but they are to be used to minister to one another and to be received in ministry from one another. They are gifts to be invested for the sake of Christ's glory in His church. Jesus taught this in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. **(Mat 25:14-30)**

If we are Christ's servants, truly we must invest that which He has given us in varying degree for the sake of His church and for the sake of His glory. The one who receives of the common grace of God and is blind to God's grace and so squanders His kindness is the one

who demonstrates that he does not know God. Ungratefulness and self-absorption are the marks of worldlings, but it is not the mark of His church. Beloved, I must ask you. Do we know the greatness of the grace of God in salvation by faith alone in Christ alone and do we recognize the greatness of Christ's grace to us in the gifts that we enjoy as His people? Not only are we forgiven of sin, and clothed with Christ's righteousness, but we are also blessed in order that we might honor Him with our lives today. We are not deserving of any of His gifts -- not salvation and not the varied gifts of His grace. Are we using the gracious gifts that we have received from Christ for the glory of God? Are we investing those gifts for an eternal purpose and blessing? Paul wants us to know that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, is the giver and the dispenser of every good gift that we have received and it causes him to launch into an explanation of how the Lord Jesus Christ has become the giver of those gifts.

2) It is by His condescension and His conquest that Jesus Christ is the source of every gift of grace that we enjoy. (v. 8-10) That is what Paul is getting at when he quotes from Psalm 68 in verse 8. In order to explain how this grace flows to us, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18. Psalm 68 is a psalm of the conquest of God. It is a psalm that pictures God as a great warrior, as a King mighty in battle, who ascends His throne, and who parades before Him the enemies that He has subdued, taking His rightful place and receiving gifts and tribute for His powerful victory. In ascribing this Psalm to Jesus, Paul puts the Lord Jesus Christ into this role, affirming His glory as conquering God and Lord. And he describes how He has conquered -- descending and ascending. It is a description of Christ incarnation, crucifixion and ascent to glory. We see this explained so clearly in the familiar text of Philippians 2: **(Php 2:5-11)** No man has ever done what the God-man has done. No man ever could. No man could perfectly fulfill the Law of God, exhaust the wrath of the sin-hating, holiness-loving God against His people through His substitutionary sacrifice on the cross. The Father has poured out His wrath against our sins to the uttermost upon Christ's head, upon the beloved, the righteous substitute on the cross -- and for that reason we are forgiven and covered with the spotless robe of His righteousness having taken away all of sins that the Father has imputed to Him. The just and holy response of the Father to Christ's faithfulness is to elevate and exalt Christ and to give Him a name above all names -- the name Lord. In all of this Christ has been shown to be Christ the Victor, the conquering Lord.

Paul is applying the description of God the King in Psalm 68 to Jesus Himself, only there is a little twist in the way that he does it. If you look at Psalm 68:18 it tells us that God in his ascension to the throne "received" gifts from men, but here it is Christ in his ascension giving gifts to men. In doing this, Paul goes beyond the imagery of the King of Heaven receiving gifts to the picture of the triumphant Christ giving gifts to His people out of His own reward as victor. Paul wants us to see a picture, then, of the Lord Jesus Christ leading in His triumphal parade the devil and sin and hell and death -- the great enemies that were against us and which had held us in bondage for so long. Paul is reminding us that our Lord came into this world, to deal with and to conquer our enemies and having finished His glorious campaign and having routed his enemies, He has returned to heaven leading all of

these enemies captive and showering the spoils of war, showering His bounty, **which He earned**, upon His people as a gift of His grace.

Do you see this exalted view of Christ that Paul has here? Do we share that same view? Certainly we cannot raise Christ higher than He is in Heaven, but we can exalt Him in our hearts. Let us exalt Him with our lips, praise Him, pray to Him, sing of Him and speak of Him. Let us exalt Him in our lives, living holy lives that magnify Him, that reflect a life worthy of Him as Lord. Let us exalt Christ so that others are drawn to Him through our exaltation and so that the body of Christ is built up in Him. Let us have the same mind as Paul. So all of the gifts that we enjoy as the people of God are the result of the condescension and conquest of Christ on the behalf of his people, His exaltation to glory, and they are to be used for His body and for His glory, to magnify Him and because that is the case, Paul wants us to see that

3) Though we enjoy a diversity of gifts individually, Christ has sovereignly given to His church certain gifts collectively. (v.11) Though Jesus has given varied gifts to us all to be used for His glory and for the building up of his church, Paul wants us to see that he has given us some very important gifts collectively, gifts specifically given for the sake of the church as a whole so that we would be spurred on, then, to rightly invest our lives. Paul tells us: **And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (Eph 4:11)** Christ has given to His church certain individuals -- men -- who are the gifts that have been given to His church as the spoils of war. Paul describes here these four groups of men as being gifts from God – apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers (which is the sense of the Greek here).

In what manner are these men gifts of God to the church? Well let's take **the apostles** first – the 11 faithful disciples of Christ, Mattias who was chosen by lot to replace Judas the betrayer, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. These were men who were witnesses of the resurrected Christ, called by Christ to the office of apostle, to whom Christ gave the power to perform authenticating miracles and to whom Christ gave the authority and the power by the Spirit of God to explain and expound His teaching as foundational truth for the New Covenant church and to take that truth to the ends of their known earth. Their apostolic teaching is recorded and inscripturated for us in the pages of the NT.

The prophets, on the other hand, were men who were sort of a NT equivalent to the OT prophets like Jeremiah or Isaiah. These were men who were inspired by God to speak His words in the days before the written Scriptures were completed and the canon of Scripture closed. They received direct revelation in some cases but mostly they expounded on the truth that was delivered by the apostles to the church, doing so in submission to the authority of the apostles. On occasion they told the future as in Acts 11 or 21, but like the OT prophets, their great work was to “forth-tell” the Word of God in exhorting and convicting unction and power of the Holy Spirit. They declared the Word of God faithfully and boldly and so assisted the apostles in the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ.

How are the apostles and prophets a gift to the church? Simply in the fact that they are the foundation upon which every true church all over the world for the last two thousand years has been built. **(Eph 2:20)** A church is not a church if it is not built upon the foundational truth proclaimed by the apostles and prophets. These men have no successors but there are those whom Christ has given to His church to build on this foundation – the continuing gifts of the evangelist and the pastor-teacher.

What is an **evangelist**? Well, Like John MacArthur says, a true evangelist is not a man with ten suits and ten sermons who runs a road show. Literally the word evangelist means “bearer of the good news”. The work of an evangelist is to preach and explain the good news of salvation in Christ to those who have never believed. He is a faithful proclaimer of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone, especially gifted to make the gospel simple and understandable, calling unbelievers to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Evangelists today are missionaries and church planters and those who teach, mobilize and lead others to fulfill the commission of winning the lost to Christ within the local church.

Last, there is the **pastor-teacher**, or literally **shepherd-teacher**. The pastor-teacher is given to the church of God to faithfully shepherd the souls that are entrusted to his care. He is to shepherd the flock, to be a caretaker of the flock of God, to oversee their souls, to oversee the church as a whole. As we have talked about before back when we were going through 1 Peter, pastoring the flock of God has to do with feeding and tending. The faithful shepherd will faithfully proclaim and instruct in the Word of God, with patience. Christ has given the pastor-teacher to the church to edify and strengthen the flock of God with solid, spiritual food that will produce in the sheep discernment, conviction, consistency, spiritual strength, and effective testimony to the greatness of Christ and of His saving work. He will guard the purity of the gospel entrusted to him and will labor to magnify and exalt Christ before the people of God, teaching the flock of God the Word of God, nourishing their souls, calling them to life, calling them to obey and submit to the Word of God knowing that **man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4)** He must **preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2Ti 4:2)** He must **preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1Co 1:17)** He must **preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1Co 1:23-24)** He must preach **the unsearchable riches of Christ. (Eph 3:8)**

The pastor-teacher has been given to the flock to care for and tend the flock of God by seeing that God’s sheep feed in a rich pasture that is filled with prayer, fellowship, and worship. The pastor-teacher has been given to the church to bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, to care for the sick and hurting, to intercede in prayer for the flock, earnestly and faithfully, to provide godly counsel and to encourage the fellowship of the

sheep and labor for the unity of the body rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The pastor-teacher has been given to the church to encourage the flock to worship and magnify Christ, to exalt God in the power of the Holy Spirit in times of corporate worship and in the whole of their lives, to lead the sheep of God to call lost sheep into the fold, to admonish, encourage, correct, and discipline the straying, to confront those with a spirit of divisiveness, to fiercely protect the flock from the savage wolves, from false teachers and false doctrine, from secular influences that will turn souls away from Christ, from the divisive and destructive who seek to destroy the flock of God, from anything that would disrupt the unity of the body or that would bring reproach upon the gospel. The pastor-teacher has been given by Christ to guide the flock, leading them to follow the Great Shepherd. That is why when people say such minimizing things about the calling of the pastor, even in the church, they demonstrate a lack of regard for the worth of their souls and for the calling to follow Christ.

The pastor-teacher is Christ's gift to His church, not spiritual-entrepreneurs, vision-casters, cultural architects, dream-weavers, life-coaches, risk-takers, soul-strategists, or any of a hundred other cool, modern and thoroughly unbiblical models of church leadership being advocated these days. The reason for Christ's gifts and especially that of the pastor-teacher is seen clearly in verses 12-16. We see that:

4) The aim of these gifts is the maturity and growth of the body of Christ to the praise of God's glory. (v.12-16) Paul says it with a variety of phrases, but at the heart of it, these gifts have been given to the church so we may mature and so that the body of Christ may grow. Look at the phrases he uses to express this idea. These gifts of Christ's grace, and again in the context of the local church, the pastor-teachers have been given:

To equip the saints for the work of ministry – That word for equip is a word that means to prepare, strengthen, and restore for the work of the ministry. It is the idea of making someone adequate or sufficient for something. The idea here is to strengthen and equip the God's people through the ministry of the Word of God to serve within the church in Christ's name – caring for the weak and infirm, praying for one another, providing for one another's needs, encouraging, teaching, admonishing, and serving one another. It includes all of the things that Pastor Eddie spoke of a few weeks ago concerning the care ministry and more.

For building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – This word, translated as building up, literally refers to the building of a house and it is referring to the spiritual building up of the body of Christ with the expressed purpose of attaining and demonstrating the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. It is Christ's purpose that we would come to the unity of the faith. The faith that Paul is speaking of here is the content of the gospel and of Christian doctrine in its most complete form, not in some minimalized, least common denominator kind of way, but in a robust, healthy, full-orbed sort of way. It is Christ purpose that we would be deeply rooted and firmly established with one mind in the truth of the Word of

God. You've seen it. The more that we understand of God's Word, the deeper our understanding of the truth of God, the closer is our unity with others who know the Word well. At the heart of the unity is knowledge of and love for Jesus Christ. And this knowledge of the Son of God is not merely head knowledge but that deep, intimate and personal knowledge of Christ that comes through prayer and faithful obedience to God's Word, through abiding in Christ.

All this means that the sermon is not merely meant to be talked about or considered or debated, but examined and applied, the Word of God faithfully taught is to be received and submitted to with joy. It is so important for us to come here Sundays and Wednesdays and listen and learn and apply what we hear. We must grow together as we listen together and obey together so that we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

The goal, then, is that the body will grow to **mature manhood... the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**. Christ's desire is that His body would grow to complete Christlikeness, that we would walk in the same manner that he walked. Maturity is evidenced by an ever increasing conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.

And that maturity is reflected in the fact that we are **no longer... children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes**. Instead we are firmly rooted in the Word of God, grounded and unshakable in the truth. Christ's design is not that we would be immature, but grown up in Him. Immature Christians never seem to have any settledness, no firmness of faith and convictions. Instead their opinions tend to be those of the last preacher they heard or the last book they read and that fall prey, it seems, to every new spiritual fad coming down the pipe. They lack discernment and do not consider things critically or expose them to the light of Scripture and yet this is exactly what we must do if we would be mature in Christ. Discernment regarding worldly philosophy and spiritual falsehood and stability in the truth are vital to the mature Christian and the mature church and that is why Christ has given to his church men to preach and teach and instruct in the word of God so that as Romans 12:2 encourages us: **(Rom 12:2) John Piper says of this text: Everywhere you turn your discernment is being tested—are you a babe being carried along by politicians who manipulate Scripture? Are you a babe being shaped by posters that subtly endorse an immoral agenda? Are you a babe being formed and guided by TV advertisers that plant assumptions and desires in your mind? Or are you growing up with the body of Christ into the maturity and discernment and stability of Christ in the truth?**

Instead of spiritual immaturity, Paul shows us that it is Christ's purpose for us, rather, that **speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ**. Instead of being swept all over by every wind of doctrine, we are to speak the truth in love. Literally we are to be "truthing it in love." It carries with it the idea of speaking the truth and living out the truth, holding fast to the truth in love. The emphasis here is to hold

to and proclaim the truth of the God's Word and to back up that profession by the way that we live.

So often we hear people set up a false dichotomy between truth and love. They pit love and truth against one another as if they are opposed to each other. All that demonstrates is a lack of understanding regarding truth and love. Love is not enemy of truth, falsehood is. Truth is not the enemy of love, hatred is. To conceal truth in the name of love is hatred. The goal of living and speaking the truth is the nurturing of real Christian love – a love rooted in the reality of God's truth.

Truth without love produces a pharisaical self-righteousness. Sentimental love without truth leads to the condoning of sin, to the acceptance of errors in doctrine. But truth and love joined together produces a balance which cares for the individual, but is concerned for his or her highest good. It demands firmness in the truth, demands firmness in holiness but is gracious and patient and rooted in the desire for one's spiritual best.

In this way we will **grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.** In speaking and in living the truth in love we will grow up in every way in Christ – every area of our life becoming increasingly submitted to the Lordship of Christ – our thought life, our emotions, our bodies, our morals, our relationships, and the use of our gifts – all of it submitted to Christ's Lordship. We are committed to "truthing in love" so that our lives are characterized by self-giving, self-sacrificing, love of Christ and for His people in all that we do; and our own personal growth itself is ultimately designed not only for His glory, but for the well-being of one another. As a result, the whole body of Christ, as we individually invest the entirety of our lives in the body of Christ, joined together and working properly, will make the body to grow, spiritually and numerically, so that it builds itself up in love.

See the beautiful symmetry and synergy that is in this text. It is from Christ, the head of the body that the church receives these grace gifts, the resurrection power, its life and spiritual energy. It is He who joins us together and holds us together, every joint, sustaining us by His grace. And as He pours His life into us and grows us and as we then pour our lives into His body, Christ makes the church to grow and to be vibrant, growing spiritually and numerically to the praise of His glory and the whole body, energized by Christ builds the body.

In this text lies the answer to the great "how" question of the Christian life. Every Christian knows that we are here to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But, how do we do that? We glorify God and enjoy Him by living each day in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and by using the gifts of grace that He has given to us to see His kingdom grow.

This text brings us to some questions that we need to ask ourselves, questions that demand an answer:

- 1) Am I, are you, investing your life and the gifts that have been given you by Christ's grace in the body of Christ, for the gospel, and for the sake of the glory of Christ? Are we using the gracious gifts that we have received from Christ for the glory of God? Are we investing those gifts for an eternal purpose and blessing?
- 2) Do I, do you, have the same exalted view of Christ and the greatness of His grace that Paul has? Do we live gratefully aware of His favor as we should?
- 3) Are we thankful for the gifts that God has provided for our growth in maturity and for the growth of the church and the expansion of His kingdom?
- 4) Are we availing ourselves of every opportunity to be firmly rooted and grounded in the Word of God? Are we making growth in Christ and in His Word one of the fundamental pursuits of our lives?
- 5) Are we "truthing in love"? Does our theology find expression in the way that we live? And are we living for something greater than ourselves? Are we living for the expansion of the Kingdom of God and the glory of Christ?

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