

The Gifts You Bring

August 13, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Ephesians 4:7-16

Session Outline

1. The Giving of Gifts (Ephesians 4:7-10)
2. The Purpose of Gifts (Ephesians 4:11-12)
3. The Goal of Gifts (Ephesians 4:13-16)

Theological Theme

The Lord gave all believers gifts for specific purposes. We should be intentional about using our gifts to bring glory to God and support the body of Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians about the gifts and their roles in the local church.



Leader Guide

The Gifts You Bring

Introduction

What kind of gift giver are you? Do you spend an inordinate amount of time searching for the perfect gift to bless the recipient? Do you grab something last minute and hope they love it anyway? Do you send a gift card and let the person just get whatever they want? There are many different types of givers just as there are different ways to accept gifts.

Think about how you tend to give and receive gifts. Can you remember getting a gift that changed your life in some way? Some people know us so well that they can give us the types of gifts that affect our lives in big ways. Knowing someone well plays a significant role in knowing what gift they need or will use the most. Today we will see the Lord knows exactly what gifts to give to His people and how those gifts should be used to make a difference for the kingdom's sake.

- ❓ What kind of gift giver are you? Who gives you gifts that make a big difference in your life?
- ❓ What is the gift you've received that stands out to you the most and why?


Session Summary

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul reminded them about the gift of grace they had been given through Jesus Christ. He stressed that the gifts God gives are not based on what people do but what they need. He gives us gifts because of His great love for us, and all our gifts are given of the Spirit instead of being something anyone can earn or manipulate. It is important to realize the difference in the way God gives gifts as opposed to the way people give gifts.

The Lord knows everything about us and has an end goal in mind. His gifts come with an eternal, significant purpose. In today's passage, Paul specifically mentioned some of the gifts and their important roles in the church body. When people with these gifts work together the way God designed, individual believers and the church will be impacted. This portion of Paul's letter was meant to help early Christians recognize how to mature spiritually and live out their faith to become more like Jesus. The same message helps believers today.


1. The Giving of Gifts (Ephesians 4:7-10)

Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus to help them know how to live as Christians. Though written to a specific audience, it is also applicable to the church today. In seeking to remind the believers of the gifts God had given them, Paul started with grace. To understand the importance and significance of spiritual gifts, we should first grasp the gift of grace. Paul stressed that this grace was given to us based on the work of Jesus and had nothing to do with our earning or deserving it.

 Why is it important to recognize we do not earn gifts from the Lord?

Spiritual gifts follow this same pattern. No one earns their gifts. God gives them to all who follow Him. They are free, unmerited gifts just like grace. Paul reminded the Ephesians that the gifts from God are grounded in what occurred when Jesus ascended into heaven after the resurrection. This marked His ultimate victory over sin and death.

In writing of Jesus's ascending and leading a host of captives, Paul referenced Psalm 68. These words paint a picture of a military leader who has beaten all the enemies, taken captives, and is returning home. Jesus was victorious over all that the enemy threw at Him, and He ascended back to the Father's side in heaven.


 How does the image of Jesus as a victorious military leader speak to you? How does this highlight Jesus's authority and power to give spiritual gifts?

Pointing back to the resurrection was a reminder of the encouragement Jesus gave His followers just before He left them. Before Jesus's death, He told the disciples it was better for Him to go so that He could send the Helper to be with them (John 16:7). Jesus was not leaving them

Distribution of the Gifts


Borrowing an illustration from Psalm 68:18, Paul described the gifts given to the church. God is both sovereign and generous in His distribution of the various gifts.

abandoned and helpless. The Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, is God and along with His presence, believers received gifts of the Spirit. In Ephesians, Paul connected the giving of gifts to the very nature of God. He loves His people and not only sent Jesus as our gift of grace. He also gives other spiritual gifts so that we can live in a way that honors Him and furthers His kingdom.


 Application: How is your daily life impacted by God's grace to you? How might you live in response to this moving forward?

2. The Purpose of Gifts (Ephesians 4:11-12)


Referring to Jesus, Paul wrote that He was the one who established the roles of the different gifts. These gifts are not dependent on or dictated by people but are the work and appointment of Jesus. The gifts of the Spirit should be considered as divine institutions and not human creations. Paul's wording describing the different gifts makes it clear that there is divine purpose behind the distribution of each gift.

 Why does it matter whether these gifts are divine institutions or human creations?

The gifts mentioned by Paul here are not an exhaustive list, but he referenced several gifts specifically. The roles he named are purposefully distinct.


 Why do you think Paul was so specific about the purpose of these gifts? How might the Ephesians (and we) be tempted to use them wrongly?

We have established that the gifts are given to equip the saints, but what are the saints equipped for? The saints are equipped to build up the body of Christ as a whole. There is no room for selfish ambition, personal agendas, or pride. The purpose these specific roles is so that the church will be strengthened as Christ's representative body in the world.

 Application: How are you being equipped for the work of the ministry so that the body of Christ is strengthened through your involvement? What responsibility do you have in this?


3. The Goal of Gifts (Ephesians 4:13-16)

After stating the purpose, Paul expressed the end goal of the gifts. Unity among believers in the body of Christ is paramount to the work of the ministry. Paul stated the goal as unity of the faith. He urged the body to be unified around the knowledge of the Son of God. When the gifts are used together, the body is equipped for the ministry, and we have greater knowledge of and intimacy with the Lord. That is the goal.

 How does unity within the body of Christ contribute toward or detract from the church's pursuit of God's mission to make His name known in the world?

As the body of Christ experiences greater unity, the saints mature in their faith. The more a believer matures in his or her faith, the more he or she becomes like Jesus. We see this in individuals and the collective church body. We should not just age chronologically as believers—we should also grow up in our faith and develop more into the likeness of Christ.

Paul explained as Christians grow in maturity, they will be more stable in their faith. No longer will they be tossed about like children, following whoever says the most appealing things. Christian maturity means growing stronger in your faith and convictions as you balance everything against the unchanging Word of God. Christians are to be strong enough to resist the temptation to believe the teachings of the world and fall prey to making decisions based on the opinion of people instead of the wisdom of God.

 How do you see people falling prey to making decision based on what is popular or politically correct instead of biblical wisdom?

Those who are mature in Christ will not be as susceptible to spiritual deceit. To stand firm on God's Word, a person must know it. Part of equipping the saints is teaching them the Word. As the body grows and matures in faith, people make a difference in the world because they do not give in to the passing fads and lies the world throws at them.

We have focused much on the body of Christ as a whole, but for the body to function correctly, the individual pieces must function properly too. Just as a human body is held together by joints and ligaments, every part of the body of Christ is connected. It's clear when the body works well and when it doesn't. The same is true of the church. When the individuals who make up the body of Christ do their part to grow and mature in a coordinated effort, the church fulfills God's intended purpose in the world.

- Application: How well would you say you function as an individual who is connected to the whole body of Christ? What needs to change for you to fulfill your role?

Conclusion

As Christ followers, we need to recognize the spiritual gifts God gives us and use them for the purpose He designed. Not everyone receives the same gifts and not every gift is used for the same purpose. Gifts from the Lord are different than gifts from people because spiritual gifts are based on Jesus, not on us. We are gifted as God designates and not based on our own efforts or merit.

Paul listed several gifts that make up the body of the church. It is important to understand these roles and the value they bring when working together as God intends. The gifts are meant for the good of the body of Christ and with the goal of equipping the saints, or fellow believers, for the work of the ministry. It is powerful to see what happens when believers work together in unity to equip others for ministry. This leads everyone to mature in their faith and become more like Jesus.

- What is something new you learned about spiritual gifts from this passage? Do you know your spiritual gift(s)? How can you find out?
- What do you need to do differently to use your gifts for the work of the ministry?
- How should all spiritual gifts have the goal of spreading the name of Jesus throughout the world?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for loving you and gifting you perfectly. Ask for wisdom to know and use your gifts in ways that honor Him and build up the body.

Additional Resources

- *Spiritual Gifts* by Dan Darling
- *Spiritual Gifts* by Thomas Schreiner
- *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* by Tony Merida

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

For Next Week

Session Title

- Leaders Who Make Leaders

Main Passages

- 2 Timothy 2:1-26

Session Outline

1. Make Leaders (2 Timothy 2:1-2)
2. Stay Focused (2 Timothy 2:14-15)
3. Prepare Yourself (2 Timothy 2:22-26)

Memorize

From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part. - Ephesians 4:16

Prayer

1. What gifts do you believe God has given you? Ask God for guidance on how to use your gifts to bring Him glory and build up the body.
2. Pray over someone in your community and the gifts God has given them to use for His glory.

Historical Context of Ephesians

Purpose

The book hints at several purposes. The apostle taught that Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ. This oneness was to be demonstrated by their love for one another. Paul used the noun or verb form of love (agapē) nineteen times (about one-sixth of the total uses in all the Pauline letters). Ephesians begins with love (1:4–6) and ends with love (6:23–24).

Paul implicitly addressed matters raised by the mystery religions in the Lycus Valley. The letter has much to say about redemption (1:7) and the divine intention for the human race (1:3–14). Additional themes include grace (1:2), predestination (1:4–5), reconciliation, and union with Christ (2:1–21).

Author

Paul referred to himself by name as the author of the book of Ephesians in two places (1:1; 3:1). Many regard this book as the crown of all of Paul's writings. Today some scholars think the book contains a writing style, vocabulary, and even some teachings that are not typical of the apostle. If that is the case, then it would mean a disciple of Paul had surpassed him in theological insight and spiritual perception. Of such an erudite disciple the early church has no record. Furthermore, pseudonymity (writing under someone else's name) probably was not practiced by early Christians. We can conclude, in line with the indisputable acceptance of Pauline authorship in the early church, that there is no reason to dispute the Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

Setting

Paul penned the letter while in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Disagreement exists concerning whether Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Ac 24:22) around AD 57–59 or in Rome (Ac 28:30) in about 60–62 when he wrote this letter. Tradition suggests that Paul wrote the letter from Rome around AD 60–61 which would have transpired while Paul was under house arrest in guarded rental quarters (Ac 28:30). Paul most likely wrote Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians during the same imprisonment.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is an anthem to the sovereign grace of God displayed toward sinners in Christ. It contains some of the worst news ("you were dead in your trespasses and sins") and best news ("but God . . . made us alive with Christ") in all of Scripture. In view of this grace, Paul calls believers to "live worthy of the calling" we have received.

Extended Commentary

Ephesians 4:7-16

4:7 Paul grounds variety within the church's unity. God has granted a measure of grace to each believer as a gift from Christ.

4:8 This verse is an allusion to Ps 68:18. The essence of the psalm is that a military victor has the right to receive gifts from the people he has conquered and who now are his subjects. Paul suggested that Christ has conquered his enemies and has given gifts to them, with Paul himself being the perfect example. As victor over sin and death, Christ gives gifts to his new devoted followers, his captives.

4:9–10 Paul emphasized that the resurrected and exalted Christ now imparts all the fullness of his blessings to the church and to the universe (1:10, 19–23; 3:20–21).

4:11 The description here is more about gifted people (natural gifts that can be honed and used for the kingdom) than about spiritual gifts (contrast with Paul's meaning in Rm 12; 1Co 12–14). Five groups of gifted people are listed: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Apostles and prophets are foundational for the church's work (Eph 3:5). The term apostles primarily refers to people sent with a divine mission or task. They also served as spokesmen for God, bringing new revelation and understanding to the church. Prophets revealed God's will to believers for the present (forthtelling) and predicted the future (foretelling). All apostles were prophets, but not all prophets were apostles.

Evangelists were gifted to spread the gospel and plant churches. Evangelists proclaimed the good news in word and deed and instructed others in evangelism. Pastors and teachers shared similar responsibilities. Pastors provided oversight, comfort, and guidance as the church's shepherds (Ac 20:28; 1Pt 5:1–4). Teachers instructed and helped apply God's revelation to the life of the church. Teachers were concerned with passing on the church's revealed teachings (1Co 15:3–4) rather than bringing new inspirational insights like the prophets. Teachers are indispensable for building up the church and are necessary to enable believers to distinguish false doctrine from true teaching.

4:12 The purpose of the gifted people is to equip others to minister. Like many other long sentences in Ephesians, vv. 11–16 form one long sentence in the original Greek text. The term translated equipping was sometimes used to refer to mending or restoring.

4:13 Ministry is intended to move believers toward accomplishing three goals: (1) unity of faith and full knowledge of God's Son, (2) maturity, and (3) the fullness of Christ. Maturity and unity are measured in terms of the relationship of the body to the head, Christ.

4:14 When the gifted people equip the church, the community of faith will evidence stability in precept and practice.

4:15 Speaking the truth in love: When a church is faithful to speak truth in love, it will have transparent relationships where people edify and benefit one another.

4:16 Ultimately the church will grow up into Christ in all aspects, with each part fitting together and supporting the other. Each member of the body must function properly if the body is to grow. We get our English word harmony from the Greek term translated fitted and knit together.¹

References

1. David S. Dockery, “Ephesians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1876.

Author Bio

Dan Darling (Spiritual Gifts)

Daniel Darling is an author, pastor, and leader. He is the director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dan is a bestselling author of several books, including *The Original Jesus*, *The Dignity Revolution*, *The Characters of Christmas*, *The Characters of Easter*, *The Characters of Creation*, *A Way With Words*, and a children’s book, *The Biggest Best Light*. He is the general editor of a small group study on racial reconciliation, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, author of a Bible study on spiritual gifts, and a contributor to *The Worldview Study Bible*.

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Thomas R. Schreiner (PhD, Fuller Theological Seminary) is James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. His numerous books include *New Testament Theology* and *Romans in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*.

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