

## **“We Are Called to Serve: A Teaching on Spiritual Gifts”**

*Ephesians 4:7-12*

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### **Ephesians 4:7-12**

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”<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.)<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.

### **Introduction**

The Church is far from being boring but rather is excitingly diverse. Paul sees an alienated and fractured humanity being reconciled and recreated to be used by Him, which is the church of Jesus Christ. The key to Christian growth is not just in numbers but its members growing in character, purity, and in serving one another. Today we’ll be looking a section of Ephesians 4 that discusses spiritual gifts. In the last section, verse 6 focuses on God as Father of all (“*all of us*”) but verse 7 begins with each (“*each of us*”), which shows us that He gives grace to all of us, but He also gives grace to each of us in a special and different way. This is so that unity can take place in diversity, and this is not only because of the different ethnicities, cultures, temperaments, and personalities but also the different gifts that is distributed in the body. There are many misunderstandings about spiritual gifts, so we’ll clarify some of these today, but not all of them. We’ll see what spiritual gifts are, and how we can use these gifts that God has given us to serve those around us as the church of Jesus Christ. If you’re concerned about the happiness of other people, serving other people, you can be happy because you can always do that. Therefore, always be serving other people. There’s incredible joy of serving others – becoming an others-centered person.

### **I. Who gives spiritual gifts? [7-10]**

<sup>7</sup> But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. <sup>8</sup> Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”<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.)

#### **A. God gives saving grace and serving grace [7]**

God Himself is giving the gifts and the gifts are considered as part of grace.

*Ephesians 2:8 - For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

God is the one who graciously gives these gifts as described here. God has allotted a very specific grace to each of us and we are called to use these gifts to serve others. Verse 7 describes a serving type of grace. In Greek, this word for grace is called ‘charis.’ The Greek word that ties in grace and gifts is known as ‘charismata.’ This means that gifts and grace are interrelated. This means we are not only saved but saved to serve others. Therefore, it is grace – charis – that unites brothers and sisters within the church, but the diversity stems from charismata which are different gifts and abilities. If we are others-centered and serving, we become happy and joyful.

## **B. Christ gives the gifts through the Holy Spirit [7]**

Christ gives us specific gifts through the Holy Spirit. This passage brings up the discussion of gifts but there are also other passages such as 1 Corinthians 12.

1 Corinthians 12:8, 11 - <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>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

Jesus Christ is the one who gives us our spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit. What does this mean? Jesus Christ gives us the Holy Spirit himself, but through the Holy Spirit, He gives us the gift. The Holy Spirit then enables us with power to use the gift for His purposes, so that we can effectively serve other people to show other people who Christ is.

## **C. Our gifts to Christ and Christ's gifts to us [8-10]**

Ephesians 4:8 - *Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."*

Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension gives him all the authority to give us these gifts. The verse implies that since he is now ascended, he sends us the Holy Spirit which gives the body of Christ which enables us to use the gifts. Verse 8 here quotes something directly from Psalm 68:18, *"You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there."*

Psalm 68 describes an event where God goes before his people in victory after the Exodus and is also describing a future triumph of Jesus Christ going before us. Ephesians 4:8 says, *"He gave gifts to men,"* however Psalm 68:18 says, *"Receiving gifts from men."*

The reason for this difference is because when a king wins in a war, all the spoils of the opposing side will go to the king. The king will then take these spoils and distribute them to the people. We see this same analogy played out in Jesus Christ. We were once among the rebellious, but that all change when he came, invaded, and defeated our sin. Now we have the amazing privilege of giving our lives to the Lord because he has finally won the war. We get to be part of Christ's body. Now what happens: 'He gives gifts to men,' despite what we've done as hell-deserving sinners. And that's the picture we see as the church of Jesus Christ because of his victory through the death and resurrection. He infuses in us the ability to serve others, to picture him, to rejoice in him, to have that joy of God as we serve other people, as he serves us. Therefore, we can never be proud of the gifts we have because all of these things are given to us by God's gracious hand. To become prideful is to forget where all these things came from.

## **II. What are spiritual gifts? [11-12]**

<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.*

There are five helpful passages to clarify some misunderstanding about spiritual gifts. I do not want you to be misinformed about this.

1 Corinthians 12:1 - *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed.*

### **A. Spiritual gifts are varied and the lists in the Bible are illustrative not exhaustive [11]**

We'll go through the entire list, but please remember what is written here is not every spiritual gift that exists in human society or history.

Ephesians 4:11 - *And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers.*

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 - *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.*

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 - *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?*

Romans 12:6-8 - *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 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.*

1 Peter 4:11 - *whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

Two main things: word-oriented ministry and service-oriented ministry.

These 5 passages describe around 20 spiritual gifts that God gives to the church in an illustrative manner. In the context of this part of Ephesians 4, Paul is specifically addressing apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers. Some may be wondering, what are my spiritual gifts? The best way to find out is to simply do whatever you're good at and watch God use those things to glorify Himself. You do not need to know the specifics before you start, but to simply begin using what you have an affinity for by serving God and others.

Jim George sums this idea up in a quote: *“Start where you are, do anything you can do, and do everything you can do until you find something you must do.”*

## **B. Spiritual gifts could be abilities one developed naturally that can be used by God spiritually after spiritual birth or abilities given and developed after spiritual birth.**

### **1. Abilities one developed naturally that can be used by God spiritually after spiritual birth**

This simply means one is born good at doing certain things. Once we become saved, the Holy Spirit can take what we've honed naturally and now bring glory to God through it. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, we see that two gifts are mentioned. The gift of helping and administrating. Naturally some people before salvation enjoy helping others or some may be naturally meticulous at things, but God can redeem both of them for His purposes.

1 Corinthians 12:28 - *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.*

## **2. Ability given and developed after spiritual birth**

There are certain gifts that become possible after becoming a believer. Some examples are miracles and various kinds of tongues. If these were not present before spiritual rebirth, it's a strong indication that it was given after and not before. Each and every gift that is brought out into the local church can be an opportunity of exchanging gifts and serving one another with what God has given us.

1 Corinthians 12:28 - *And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.*

### **C. Spiritual gifts can be abilities given to people or the people who have abilities with titles or functions [11-12]**

Ephesians 4:8 reminds us that He gives the gifts, but verse 11 also reminds us that he provides apostles, teachers, and other important roles. Spiritual gifts can be abilities given to people or they can be people given abilities, which are titles, roles and functions. Some may believe that this passage then is not about gifts since the titles and roles give it to them but the passage still implies that even the gifts associated with these are still given by God alone. These roles and titles are given so the church of Jesus Christ can be properly equipped.

### **D. The people with the titles and functions equip the people to develop their gifts to serve [11-12]**

Spiritual leaders are appointed in the church and their responsibility is not to do everything and the congregation do nothing, but to serve in such a way that allows individuals to develop their giftings so they too can serve the Lord. In the passage, there's a unique set of people with different roles and abilities: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. Word-ministry and service-ministry leaders who train up the congregation.

### **E. Spiritual gifts can be varied in different individuals, churches, cultures, and generations [11]**

Everyone is gifted in different ways and we all have the opportunity to develop other gifts we have that may not be as strong. This means individuals can have a combination of gifts. Because of this truth, that means local churches will often look very different from each other depending on what kind of people they have. Overseas, there are cultures where a certain spiritual gift is more prevalent and used by God to reach the lost and glorify Himself. What we have here in America (as gifts) may look completely different in comparison to another culture where some things may be more pronounced. As we look at culture, we also see major differences in gifting with the various generations alive today.

A current example of this is technology, and how it can be developed to bring glory to God even though it is not mentioned as one of the gifts in the passage. Healing, nowadays in our nation, may not come in the form of miraculous healing but even through the miraculous medical technology we have today. However, in third world nations where there is no medical technology, we see this type of miraculous healing by prayer occurring more often. He can even use the character of medical professionals as a form of gifts to bless and change others. This is simply true because becoming more like Jesus is what changes the people in our lives. He gives individuals, leaders, churches, cultures, and generations, different gifts so that ultimately the Church of Jesus Christ can be the gift and force of change in this world.

Francis Wellers said this, "*Deep in our bones lies an intuition that we arrive here carrying a bundle of gifts to offer to the community.*" In times of need, we can find that we have the potential to fill that gap and serve others. When you start to serve, that realization of the potential that was

inside you becomes the gift that is expressed. We need to let Jesus Christ express himself through our gifts that we have received.

### **III. Why do we need spiritual gifts? [11-12]**

*<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.*

There are two very important aspects here: to build and to equip. The word equip refers to fixing something that's broken and supplying what is lacking. So, once equipped, we build up the body of Christ and this itself proves how every member is needed because anyone can be equipped by God and used for His good purposes. We need the Church and the Church needs us so that we can picture Christ. We are left to these two purposes. We need to be equipped so that we can picture Christ to the world.

To equip and to build the church of Jesus Christ, 5 gifts are mentioned in verses 11-12. We will group these 5 gifts and roles into 3 different groups that will be the most applicable to us:

#### **A. The apostles and prophets [11]**

We see apostles and prophets mentioned here. The word, 'apostle,' does not only refer to the original role of authority to write the Scriptures spoken by Christ, but also refers to anyone who is sent out as a witness to an established church. The word, 'prophet,' not only means one who receives inspiration from God but could mean anyone who speaks boldly for God and speaking insight from Him directly. Although these two gifts and roles have ceased, we find their fulfillment recorded in Ephesians 2:20. We see how it was through apostles and prophets that we now have access to this knowledge about Him.

*Ephesians 2:20 - built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone*

It is the foundation of Jesus Christ, the cornerstone.

*Ephesians 3:5 - which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*

Though the specific role of holy apostle and prophet is no longer needed, we see how it can relate to preaching, teaching, and shepherding which is all still needed today in the Church. What was written and revealed in the New Testament was so that believers like us could receive it.

#### **B. The evangelists [11]**

The second group, unlike the first group, the gift of evangelism has not ceased. Evangelists are those who possess special ability to communicate the Gospel, but also a burden for the lost people. The role of an evangelist does not imply that people who are not evangelists by title do not need to share Christ with others. We are all called to display and share Christ because of the Great Commission. This second group simply means that there are some people who are especially gifted in this area of evangelism.

On the contrary, the evangelist is often the gift of the lay-people. Evangelists can be trained by pastors and other teachers to become leaders who end up training all the congregation/members to evangelize. The only evangelist mentioned in all of Scripture is Philip.

#### **C. The shepherds and teachers [11-12]**

These could mean two gifts but only one definite article is used in shepherds and teachers here. A pastor is called to both shepherd and teach. This could be referring to a pastor but we must remember that it doesn't always have to be an ordained pastor but it could be lay 'pastors' such as

small group leaders or even simply being an older brother or sister. Everyone needs to teach to some extent. A good example is parenting children, but there are individuals who are especially gifted to teach well.

These three groups are not only ministering to people but also training up others who will be eventually able to replicate this and teach others as well. There has to be a healthy, spiritual hierarchy of discipleship. Everyone needs to be growing and receive training. Everyone needs to be serving and strengthening the body. And the whole Church shines in the community as the Church of Jesus Christ.

If you look at these three groups, you can see them described in the great commission that Jesus gives.

Matthew 28:18-20 - *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Verse 19 can refer to evangelists training the Church to spread the good news and verse 20 can be referring to the discipleship that comes afterwards, which refers to both teachers and shepherds equipping and watching over the congregation of believers. Evangelists are likened to dealing with birth. Pastors, shepherds and teachers are likened to raising children so that they can grow in the body of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Martin Luther King Jr. once said the following, *"If you can't fly, then run. If you can't run, then walk. If you can't walk, then crawl. But whatever you do, you have to keep moving."* Like this quote, we say the same thing. Keep on serving. When you're most depressed – when you don't feel like doing anything – keep on serving. Serving will propel us to the Lord. He can give you grace so that you can still experience the joy of serving and experiencing Christ.

God has given you spiritual gifts for the Church, so don't you dare keep it to yourself. God has given you gifts so that ultimately, the Church can be the greater collective gift. Don't you dare be selfish and keep it to yourself. Release your gifts as you serve other people!

God recruits us; He finances us with the spiritual gifts. He will reward us too, but the joy will even be greater for us. The joy from having Him is our reward. We are recruited by God to deliver His love. Let's respond to the call to serve. Learn to serve and do anything you can do for others starting today.