

Spiritual Gifts

Ephesians 4:7-16

Ephesians 4:7-16: *“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.” Now this, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; 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 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

Background Notes

There are four New Testament passages on spiritual gifts. The chapter numbers make them easy to remember. There are two “12s” and two “4s” - Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. 1 Peter 4 is probably the least known of the spiritual gifts passages: *“As each one has received the gift, minister it to one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”* (1 Peter 4:10).

Before we go to the doctrinal point, I want to point out three general facts about spiritual gifts that come from this passage in Ephesians and from the other three spiritual gift passages.

1. We are talking here about spiritual gifts, not spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1 gives us a list of spiritual blessings. We see there that every Christian has all the spiritual blessings that heaven has to offer - but every Christians doesn’t have all the spiritual gifts.
2. Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. 1 Peter 4:10 says *“as each one has received the gift,”* and here in Ephesians 4:7 we read, *“but to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”*
3. The Lord not only gives us spiritual gifts, but He also gives us the ability and power to use these gifts. Christians have no excuse for not being involved. Each one of you hearing this Talk has at least one spiritual gift, and the ability and power is available from the Lord Himself so you can use your spiritual gift to help others. Are you using your spiritual gift?

Doctrinal Point

Believers should recognize and use their spiritual gifts in love.

a. **The giver of the gifts** (v7-10). Who gives the gifts? The Lord himself gives the spiritual gifts – they’re not given by the seminary or the Bible College, and they’re not conferred by ordination. The church *recognizes* the gifts - but the church does not *give* the gifts. The giver of spiritual gifts is the Lord himself.

Verse 8 quotes from Psalm 68: *“when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.”* The idea here is of a triumphal victory procession of a king who is proceeding to his throne. Gifts are being given to His followers and His defeated captives are being led away to judgment. Our Lord, the true King, has ascended to Heaven in victory. Satan and his hosts, who once held us captive, have been conquered and are led away to judgment. The Lord, the victorious king, has given gifts to us as His followers. Notice that before our Lord ascended in victory, it was necessary for Him to descend to this earth, and to the depths of death and burial - but now He has ascended to God’s right hand and He pervades the entire universe with His presence.

b. **The diversity of the gifts** (v11). *“And He gave some to be apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”* Every spiritual gift is not mentioned here, as we can see from the other gift passages, but several are. The main idea here is that there is a diversity of gifts. We believe the apostles and prophets were gifts to the early church, but their foundational gifts don’t continue as gifts today. In reference to the church, Ephesians 2:20 says, *“having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.”* The foundation of the church has been established - it is no longer being built – but many other spiritual gifts continue today.

c. **The function of the gifts** (v12). *“For the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”* Notice that the gifts are not for self-glory or entertainment, and there’s no idea here of some clergy-laity distinction. We are *all* “clergy”! We are all to use our respective gifts to help one another, to serve one another, and to help one another grow. The pastors and teachers are not supposed to be doing all the work! The gifts are given so that we can all serve one another. All together, the body is being equipped, the work of the ministry is being carried on, and the body is being edified.

d. **The goal of the gifts** (v13). *“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.”* This goal will not be fully attained until we get to Heaven, but we should aim in that direction now. In Heaven, there will be no disagreements! There will be knowledge of the Son of God and unity of faith. In Heaven, the body of Christ will be fully mature and perfect, and we will be conformed to the image of Christ. The proper use of spiritual gifts helps us move toward that goal while we are here on this earth.

e. **The results of the gifts** (v14). *“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.”* As we exercise our spiritual gifts and aim toward the goal of maturity, there will be some good results along the way - praise the Lord! There will be less immaturity (no longer children). There'll be less instability (no longer tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine). There'll be less gullibility (no longer thrown off course by the trickery of men, by their cunning craftiness and deceitful plotting.)

It's great to see how the use of spiritual gifts really does bring about these results, not only in the lives of new believers, but also in the lives of all believers. I've seen some amazing changes - miraculous changes - in the lives of many of my students at Emmaus Bible College. It happens when they get involved in the life of the Body of Christ and begin to properly use their spiritual gifts.

f. **The success of the gifts** (v15-16). *“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* When we say “success” here, we're not talking about greater numbers in the church, but more *edification* in the church. The growth here is in reference to quality, not quantity.

What's the key to the success of the spiritual gifts? Love is the key! Note the end of verse 16: *“the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* If you or I were writing this passage of Scripture apart from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we would probably have said “truth” is the key. Truth is very important, of course - in fact it is essential. But as you see from verse 15, *“the truth must be spoken in love or else the gifts will not successful”*. Remember - the church at Corinth had all the spiritual gifts, but they weren't successful because they didn't have much love for one another.

How is your church doing? Do you recognize the spiritual gifts? Do you use the spiritual gifts? Do you use your spiritual gifts in love? Believers should recognize and use their spiritual gifts in love.

Practical Application

Are you still an unopened gift?

Every Christian has received a spiritual gift - at least one (v7). Gifts are given to individuals, but gifted individuals are given to the church as gifts (v11). We are gifts with gifts! Don't forget that – it's important. Every one of us has at least one spiritual gift that the Lord has given to us. Now we're responsible to open that gift, to unwrap that gift, to develop that gift, and use that gift - because the Lord has given each one of us as a gift to the church. You are important: *“...the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each every part does its share.”*

There are a lot of unopened gifts in the church today. Are you still unopened? We also need to help others who are still unopened gifts. We need to be like our two-year-old granddaughter, Ingrid. At Christmas time Ingrid not only opens her own gifts - she opens everyone else's gifts as well! We need to be like that as Christians. We need to open up our own spiritual gifts, and we need to help others open their gifts too! Are you still an unopened gift?