



A Post Tenebras Lux Study on Ephesians...

He Gave Gifts to Men...

Ephesians 4:7-16

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:7**...But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says: "**When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.**" ⁹ (What does "**he ascended**" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Last week as we started our study on Ephesians 4, we caught a glimpse of God's desire for unity in His glorious new society the church. As we worked our way through Ephesians 4:1-6, we noticed the overarching emphasis on unity. Paul stressed the idea of unity by the repetition of the word "**one**". After he admonished the Ephesians to preserve unity in their own church body, he related reasons why they should strive for that unity. Picking up in the middle of verse 3, he wrote:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:3**...Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
It is an emphasis on the body and the unity of the body.

The grammar of the Greek in the passage is all plural. It is not just as you (singular) were called; it is just as you (plural) were called. It is in one hope of your (plural) calling. The fact that we automatically read it as singular is a reflection, I think, of the egocentric nature of our culture. We tend to think in terms of everything as it relates to us individually rather than corporately. It is a sign of our general lack of humility. You see it everywhere, but especially, I think, in the world of sports.

Sportscaster and former baseball great Ralph Kiner tells the following story: After the season in which I hit 37 home runs, I asked Pittsburgh Pirate general manager Branch Rickey for a raise. He refused. "**I led the league in homers,**" I reminded him. "**Where did we finish?**" Rickey asked me. "**Last,**" I replied. "**Well,**" Rickey said, "**We can finish last even without you.**"

But the Church of Christ is not to be thought of solely in terms of individuality. We are a body. We are a collective people and while each and every one of us has value and merit as individuals, it is really in the collective group that we find our true value, our true merit. That's why even when Paul does finally turn to a discussion of individuality he couches his discussion in terms of the value of individual gifts in the maintenance of group unity. Notice what he says in verse seven.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:7**...But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Paul has turned from the word “**one**” and the idea of unity to a discussion of the grace given to each of us. But when he does that, we have to keep in mind that he still has the notion of the group at heart. What we see is that the exalted Christ gave gifts to each individual Christian. But notice Paul doesn’t say it that way. He doesn’t say that Christ gave gifts to each person but rather that Christ gave gifts to each one of “**us**” as members of the church. The gifts though individual in their assignment only have meaning within the body.

What we are, what we can offer only has meaning within the community of faith. That’s why it so extraordinary when Christian men and women refuse to unite with a local people; when they refuse to commit to any particular local assembly of Christians. It is a refusal to accept or acknowledge the gift that the risen Christ has given to each of us.

I know a pastor that used to tell a story about a man in his congregation who was not only blind but almost stone-deaf. But he had not always been so. Before he lost the use of those crucial senses he had been an active believer. Later in life, after he had lost his sight and most of his hearing, he developed an acute case of osteoporosis. His osteoporosis was bad enough that he could not walk or move or even sit without it being painful. This pastor said that he was always amazed when every Sunday he would look down from the pulpit and see this old saint sitting there in his favorite pew, in pain, seeing nothing unable really to hear any of the sermon or music. He decided for the sake of the man that he would try to tell the man that if it was so painful for him to come to church, God would not hold it against him if he stayed home. He visited the old man at his home and after the old man finally came to realize it was him, the pastor leaned down and virtually shouted into the old man’s ear, “**Brother, why do you keep coming to**

church. I know it's hard for you. I know you can't hear or see. I know it hurts to sit on those hard pews. You know no one will blame you if you stay at home."

At first, the old man recoiled as if he had been slapped. But then his face softened and he spoke in a soft voice, **"Preacher I have to come."**

"But why," shouted the preacher.

"Well, I have to exercise my gift."

The pastor's curiosity was raised. So he leaned down and shouted, **"And what is your gift?"**

The old man smiled, **"Well preacher, I don't rightly know. But this one thing I do know. Whatever it is, I can't exercise it if I'm sitting at home."**

I love that. It reflects something of what Paul was trying to get across when he wrote.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:8...This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."**

Paul is saying that when Christ ascended into heaven He gave individuals in His church gifts. And He gave those gifts to each and every one of us. The picture that is used here was a picture that would have been common in the ancient world, particularly in the ancient Roman world. Whenever, a conquering hero

came back from some magnificent conquest, he would, if the accomplishment were grand enough, be granted a triumphal procession. In the procession or parade, he would be in the forefront and his captives with all their bounty would follow in procession behind him. It was not unusual for conquered kings, their children and even their defeated armies to have to march in procession in chains behind the conquering hero. They would be paraded as trophies of his triumph and the conquering hero would often share in the bounty of his triumph. Sometimes he would give out gold coins; sometimes he would give out sumptuous foods. It was his way of allowing his fellow citizens to share in his triumph.

That is the picture that Paul is using here. When Christ ascended into heaven, He swept up behind Him the combined forces of darkness. He swept up in His glorious train the powers and principalities of Satan that He had defeated, dethroned and disarmed. And when He did He gave gifts to men.

One of the things that I want you to notice this morning, however, is that the passage we just read is all in capital letters. That is the New American Standard's way of telling you that the passage is a quote of another Bible text. In this particular passage, Paul is quoting Psalm 68. I want you to turn there for a moment because I want you to see how Paul is using the passage.

^{NIV} **Psalm 68:7**...When you went out before your people, O God, when you marched through the wasteland, Selah ⁸ the earth shook, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel. ⁹ You gave abundant showers, O God; you refreshed your weary inheritance. ¹⁰ Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor. ¹¹ The Lord announced the word, and great was the company of those who proclaimed it: ¹² **"Kings and armies flee in haste; in the camps men divide the**

plunder. ¹³ **Even while you sleep among the campfires, the wings of my dove are sheathed with silver, its feathers with shining gold.**" ¹⁴ When the Almighty scattered the kings in the land, it was like snow fallen on Zalmon. ¹⁵ The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains; rugged are the mountains of Bashan. ¹⁶ Why gaze in envy, O rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign, where the LORD himself will dwell forever? ¹⁷ The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands; the Lord *has come* from Sinai into his sanctuary. ¹⁸ When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious-- that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.

In Psalm 68, the Psalmist is reminded the children of Israel of the great scene at Sinai. In that great time of blessing God granted plenteous gifts. It rained. It snowed. The spoil was divided among the nation. But the phrase that we want to look at is in verse 18.

^{NIV} **Psalm 68:18**...Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captive Thy captives; Thou hast received gifts among men,

Some commentators have argued that Paul deliberately misquotes the Psalmist. Paul uses **"He gave gifts to men"** while the Psalmist uses **"He received gifts from men"**. But it is important to remember that in the ancient world whenever a king conquered an enemy he always shared the bounty with his people. The defeated Egyptians gave their riches to be rid of the Jews but certainly they were giving their riches not so much to be rid of Israel as they were to be rid of Israel's God. Besides even the Hebrew word in question is sometimes translated **"brought"** giving a sense that could be something like **"Thou has brought gifts among men."** Two ancient translations, the Syriac and the Aramaic, translate it that way. In addition, Psalm 68 was almost always used at the feast of Pentecost where the Jews celebrated the giving of the law. Since that is the case, I think you can see how Paul might be using the quote.

He may be saying:

In the Old Testament, God delivered His people out of bondage from the Egyptians. He demonstrated His love for His people by leading their enemies captive and He even showed His kindness in giving His people the gift of the law. The Jews celebrated this gift at Pentecost.

But now, Christ has delivered His people out of the bondage of sin and slavery. He has demonstrated His love for His people by leading captive principalities and powers and He has showed His kindness by giving His people the gift of the Spirit collectively and individual gifts of service as well. These gifts were given at Pentecost.

Now the point Paul is trying to make is that Christ gave gifts to men. But in doing so he raises the question of Christ's descent.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:9**...(What does "**he ascended**" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

This passage has been viewed in several ways. Some see it as Christ's descent at Pentecost when He gave gifts to men. Others see it as the ancient church did, as Christ's descent into Hades. They get that from ancient texts like the Apostle's Creed or even biblical texts like 1 Peter 3:19.

^{NIV} **1 Peter 3:19**...through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰ who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,

They view this as a reference to Christ's harrowing of hell.

Others, like Calvin, view it simply as Christ's incarnation, that is, His descent to earth. Some view it as the hell Christ endured on the cross in our behalf and that fits well with passages like Philippians 2. The idea is not spatial, the idea is related to humiliation and exaltation, like the humiliation of the cross and the exaltation back to the right hand of the Father.

Whatever the idea, the point is that Christ gave gifts to men. In verses 11 and 12, Paul describes those gifts and their purpose.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:11**...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

The list given here is different than other lists given in other parts of the New Testament. Lists of various gifts are mentioned in places like 1 Corinthians 12:4 or Romans 12:8 and if you total all the various gifts up there seem to be at least twenty or so different ones. No doubt even those lists are not comprehensive.

It is interesting too, I think, that in the modern church there is a real emphasis on trying to find out what our gifts are. There are all kinds of spiritual gift surveys and tests to help saints better understand what their gift is. I am not opposed to such evaluations in principle but I have to add that they do not always take stock of the communal nature of the gifts. The gifts that God has granted us are gifts that designed to function in the new society into which we have been placed. They are not gifts that are given to us as individuals but rather gifts that are

given to us as a part of the body of Christ. The best way to find your gift is to find it in the body of Christ. If you come, if you offer yourself, others will help you evaluate how Christ has gifted you. The gift that you have been given will be more than just a natural inclination or talent, it will be something that you have been granted to aid in promoting the growth of the church.

Paul here only describes five such gifts. Notice what they are:

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:11**...It was he who gave some to be apostles...

The Bible uses the word **“apostle”** in several distinct senses. First of all, every Christian can be described as an apostle in the sense of being **“a sent one”** (John 13:16). We are all to go about the duty of proclaiming the kingdom of God. Secondly, there are some who were **“apostles”** in that they were sent forth from particular churches as missionaries. Lastly, and this is the sense in which it is used here, there were a specific group of eyewitnesses who were sent forth by Christ as His special emissaries (Acts 1:21-22, Acts 10:40-41).

^{NIV} **1 Corinthians 9:1**...Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? ² Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

These apostles were the initial builders on the foundation of Christ. In this sense there are no apostles today, but we still enjoy the fruit of their labor.

It is the same with prophets.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:11**...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets...

Let me quote John Stott:

Here again it is necessary to make a distinction. In the primary sense in which the Bible uses the word, a prophet was a person **“who stood in the council of God”**, who heard and even saw His word, and who in consequence **“spoke from the mouth of the Lord”** and spoke His word **“faithfully”**. In other words, a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of His direct revelation. In this sense, we must insist that there are no prophets today. (Pg. 161)

Obviously, if there were we would need to include their revelations in the Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). But the point of Scripture was the revelation of Christ is complete and I submit to you this morning either we have the complete revelation of Christ or we do not.

Obviously, there are men who speak in a prophetic manner in that they draw the church back to foundational issues. They speak with power and even the authority of the Scripture. Men such as Luther or Calvin or Machen, but event hey are not prophets in the technical sense. Certainly, some of the charlatans that we see on television today are not prophets.

Thirdly, Paul says there are evangelists.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:11**...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists...

Evangelists are men or women gifted at bringing others to Christ. It may be that they are gifted at evangelistic preaching, or that they are gifted at personal evangelism, or that they are gifted in sharing the gospel with small children. They may be evangelists in the sense of being church planters or pioneer missionaries.

Finally there are pastors and teachers.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:11**...It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

These are the men who are gifted in teaching the church. Some view this as one office. Others view it as two distinct gifts. It matters how you view it but here the point is that it is a gift given to the church. And it is a gift that is cumulative. We enjoy here in our tradition the faithful teaching of many gifted men. We enjoy not only our own pastor but the cumulative teaching of the great cloud of witnesses of men like Luther, Calvin, Knox, Spurgeon, Hodge, Machen, Lewis and countless others, who were given to the church for a reason. It is that reason to which Paul next addresses himself.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:12**...to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

You see the cumulative weight of all these gifts is the edification of the church; the equipping of the saints for the work of service. Their gift was given to the whole church not to do the work of the church but to prepare the church to do the work of service and to do it till it attains to the unity of the faith and the

maturity that comes from the knowledge of Christ. That is one of the reasons that we should be careful about allowing our pastor not to become an administrator of church business. That is one of the reasons that we as Presbyterians hold so tenaciously to the concept of elder rule. It's not because we don't think our pastor might not be a faithful administrator but rather because we believe he has bigger fish to fry. He must be committed to the teaching of the God's people so they can do the work of service, the work of evangelism, etc.

In doing that, he accomplishes an even bigger purpose.

^{NIV} **Ephesians 4:14**...Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶ From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

What is accomplished is the stability, the unity of the church. In the same way many of us have gifts that we ought to be exercising for the benefit of the body. We are to pursue unity and we are to do so by exercising our gifts. In isolation the gift may not have much meaning, but in the whole of the church it is a vital, life-giving part. Apart from each other we are weak and disjointed; together we are a powerful army. Let me illustrate.

Several years ago, two students graduated from the Chicago-Kent College of Law. The highest ranking student in the class was a blind man named Overton and, when he received his honor, he insisted that half the credit should go to his friend, Kasprzyzak. They had met one another in school when the armless Mr. Kasprzyzak had guided the blind Mr. Overton down a flight of stairs. This acquaintance ripened into friendship and a beautiful example of

interdependence. The blind man carried the books which the armless man read aloud in their common study, and thus the individual deficiency of each was compensated for by the other. After their graduation, they planned to practice law together. (Gary Inrig, *Life in His Body*)

Overton and Kasprzyzak used their gifts to make edify each other. Individually they were less than whole men, but together they were more than two men. That's the way the church is supposed to be. It's is that thought that leads me to say a few words about our brother, Bob Brice.

One week and one hour ago, Bob Brice stood here taking your prayer requests. The next day, Monday, Bob died. He will be desperately missed by all of us that knew him.

Originally, Bob was asked to take prayer requests in order to make up for my deficiency. I had an increasing tendency, because of my hearing, to pray for things that had not been requested, for people that had not been mentioned. But Bob was able to hear and he had a desire to help. In the months that followed, I noticed in particular three things.

First, Bob had a heart for the people of God. He kept copious notes of the things we prayed for. He remembered your names. He remembered your prayer requests. He did so because he prayed for you between Sundays. I know you noticed, as I did, that he would often ask, **"Oh, how's that sister we've been praying for?"**, or **"How did the operation go?"** He could do so because he cared for the people of God. If you ever attended the 9:00 o'clock prayer meeting, two of the first people you would see there would be Bob and Avis. And Bob always

prayed. He prayed for people. He prayed as an outpouring of the love and affection he had for the people of God. I used to love to go just to hear him pray.

Secondly, Bob had a heart for the word of God. It was always easier to teach when Bob was in the congregation. He always hung on every word. It didn't matter what the subject, Bob was always tracking you. He had a movable heart. His eyes would tear up at the least sentiment and if you said something funny or even stupid Bob couldn't help himself. He would just laugh out loud. I have been going back through the some of our previous series in order to transcribe the lessons to paper and one of the most enjoyable parts of that task is that you can always hear Bob's laughter on the tapes. He loved the word of God. He always had questions that demonstrated his theological acumen. He didn't buy everything but he pondered everything. He was always a gracious listener...which brings me to my final point.

Bob had a heart for theology. When he prayed, he always showed his love for the work of God in redemption. He had a particular love for the doctrine of justification and it wasn't it just a speculative idea for him. He loved the idea of God redeeming sinners; he loved the idea that God had redeemed him. As a result, Bob was always ready to pray for the unconverted. He was always ready to do the work of an evangelist. It was because of that, that Bob was always ready to exercise his varied gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.

Bob had the heart of Christ.

Let's pray.