

Gifts To Men

Ephesians 4:8-12

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Last week in our message, we began by saying that when Christ came to earth and ministered among us, calling men and women to Himself in eternal salvation, His mission and His efforts were, in every way, full and complete and able to accomplish all that He intended. Nothing was left to chance or happenstance. Nothing, not even the smallest of concerns or considerations was missed or forgotten.

He not only brought the gift of salvation to our souls, He also did many other very special things for us and in us. As He saved our souls and His Holy Spirit came to live within us, He also placed a very unique "calling" within our spirit, a "calling" that He fully intends for each of us to be about all the days that we remain in this life.

And then also, knowing that we are unable, in our natural self, to carry out such matters of the Holy Spirit, He very graciously then put special Spiritual gifts within our spirit, enabling and empowering us to engage in and carry out every part of our special "calling".

And note especially that the Lord Jesus saw fit to make sure we understood that the "gifts" and the "calling" came directly from His Own Hand and not from some natural talent within us. In verses 8 and 11 we read . . .

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Folks, these words are clear and plain so that we will not misunderstand. This is God's own hand at work. Each of us is unique to God and each of the gifts and the callings He puts within us is by His own hand and is unique to each of our souls.

It is one thing for us to believe and to accept that before the foundations of the earth were formed God designed certain plans for each of us. But here, the added emphasis is being given to say that Jesus has "hand-picked" each one of us!

Recall also the words from Isaiah 43 where God reassures us,

1 . . . "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:1-3)

We must not misread these words or the words of our text and think that God has simply issued a "general call" to all people to "go into all the world and get about being good people, and while we are out there, to tell somebody about Jesus". Not at all! Yes, everyone should be "good people" and everyone should tell others about Jesus. But these words are plain and they are specific. Christ is saying to us, "You are not only my beloved bride; you are also my purchased possession. I have bought you at a great price, My Own Blood. You are Mine!

I have called you by name. And I have placed a special "calling" within your heart, a lifelong task that I want you, and only you, to carry out. And to make sure that you are able to do all that I will ask of you, I will personally place special gifts within your Spirit to enable you to do them.

So then folks, we truly do have everything that we need for "life and godliness". And we really can step on forward with great confidence, because we are completely equipped in every way for every circumstance that we will encounter.

All of this goes to admonish us to be watchful and not allow the matters and the events of this life to just "happen" to us. "Free will" has a way of capturing our attention and causing us to drift off into meaningless and unproductive and even destructive directions.

Our part, as the Spirit of Christ begins to fill our heart, is to open our eyes to the vision He has set before us, and to yield our hearts to Him and to His purposes and His calling and His gifts. Once we do that, our whole life will begin to change. We will find ourselves transported into purposes and plans and undertakings we would never have otherwise imagined.

I would be remiss in these words if I did not also acknowledge and warn us about the resistance we will encounter from our adversary, the devil. He is very real and he is ever and always in opposition to all these good things that God has planned for us. The demonic world is an ever-present predator of our souls, traveling to and fro throughout the earth, seeking whom they may devour, their mission ever and always to "steal, to kill

and to destroy". It is who satan and his demons are and what they do, so we should expect nothing less.

But with that being said, we can be of good cheer, because our God is ever so much more powerful and able to protect us from satan's schemes of misfortune and misdeeds. May I read some assuring words from our Lord! In John 16, Jesus said . . .

33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
(John 16:33)

And in 1 John 4 we read,

4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

And in 1 John 5 we read,

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. 5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4-5)

And then, when we read in 2 Peter 1 that God has given us everything we need for "life and godliness", we can be completely confident when we step on forward with the gifts and the calling that Christ has put into our hearts.

Our words again from Ephesians 4, beginning in verse 8 and then verses 11 and 12 . . .

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11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:8, 11-12)

In verse 8, we read that as the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave "gifts" to men, special and unique Spiritual gifts. And in verse 12, we see the purpose of those gifts . . .

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12)

The special gifts that Christ gave to men and women were many. Here, in these words, we are given five of them, "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers". In Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12, we read where several other gifts are also given.

For today, may we study some of these given here, then perhaps we will move on to some of the other gifts.

But first, may I again reiterate some of the thoughts that we have already mentioned! It is most important that we know that before these gifts can be given to us, we absolutely must have Christ as our Savior and have His Holy Spirit living within us. Our natural self could not contain such wonders!

Also, these gifts are not intended for our own private use and enjoyment. While yes, they will provide us with great joy, their real intended purpose is for the benefit of others, especially those within the Body of Christ. Verse 12,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12)

And yes, these gifts will also bless many who are outside the Body of Christ, especially the gift of “evangelism” as new believers are brought to Christ. But for the most part, first and foremost the gifts are intended for the blessing and benefit of the Body of Christ.

And also again, may we be clear that these gifts are not to be confused with the gifts of “common grace” that God gives to all men and women, those talents and abilities that God gives to us to enable us to live and to take care of ourselves and our families, abilities and talents that are irrespective of whether or not we believe in the God who gave them to us. “Common graces” are given both to the “just” and to the “unjust”, just as rain falls on the “just” and the “unjust”.

No, these “Spiritual gifts of grace” that we will be studying about here are very, very different, very special, very unique, very “uncommon”, and are only given to those who have the Spirit of Christ dwelling within their soul through salvation.

And note as we study these special gifts, that implicit within each of them is both the “gift” itself, and also the “calling”. By that I mean, for those who are “called” to be “prophets” they are appropriately given the “gift” of “prophecy”.

One additional thought before we begin to examine these “gifts” . . . as with so many of the matters within these scriptures, when men, sometimes you and I, read these words, our minds reach for differing interpretations of what the words mean. Yes, we are strongly warned that no scripture is left to man’s interpretation. And we should never do it, however, unfortunately, we still do. And so, each of these words and each of their intended meanings will be found to be “subjective” in their meaning.

Beginning with the first of the gifts mentioned here, the “Gift of Apostleship”. What does the word Apostle mean? And how should it be applied in our twenty-first century churches? The title apostle comes from the Greek word “apostolos” which means “a messenger, one sent forth on a mission”. Apostles were the first leaders of the Church, commissioned by Jesus to go forth and to preach the gospel and to teach the scriptures. They were the remaining eleven disciples, along with others, Paul, James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, and on and on.

A great number of Christians of our day believe that the title of “apostle” should be reserved only for those in that first generation of Christians, and therefore the title should no longer be used. But perhaps just as many other believers hold that the calling and the gift is still valid.

Many churches, such as those in the Pentecostal denominations consider the role of a missionary and of certain preachers to be fulfilling an apostolic ministry.

For the most part, most of the modern-day mainline churches, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians hold to the belief that the title of “Apostle” is reserved only for those among the first generation of Christians.

But because the scriptures are not clear about whether or not “Apostleship” is still being given to men, I personally have withheld my own commitment on the matter, and especially so because knowing that many men and women are still continually being “sent forth” to preach and to teach the gospel. So, it’s OK with me if the title “Apostle” might still be used.

Also, the next “gift” mentioned here, “Prophet” has controversy in its meaning and application among the brethren. At its root, the meaning of the word “prophecy” is the “giving forth of the word of God”. And for that reason, I accept that the “gift of prophecy” is very necessary as preachers and teachers and evangelists give forth the words and the teachings of God from these scriptures.

The controversy arises as some of the brethren, especially some of our Pentecostal and Charismatic friends insist that prophetic words can come spontaneously into a person’s mind and not necessarily be from the words already given in scriptures. That can be a very dangerous and “slippery slope” for believers to find themselves on. Nothing should be added to or taken away from the scriptures as they have already been given. In other words, no “new revelation” comes to man. All of God’s revelation has already been given within the pages of our scriptures and must not be added to or taken away from.

The most obvious of those who cross that line and corrupt prophecy are the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses. Their teaching is filled with new and different revelation completely outside of the Word of God.

So then, yes, “prophecy” is good as long as it is the “giving forth of the words of God”. One additional thought . . . the gift of prophecy is not given exclusively to preachers and teachers and evangelists. God’s Spirit can give the gift of prophecy to any of the members of His church. Some of you may have the “Spiritual Gift of Prophecy”.

The next gift mentioned is the “Gift of Evangelism”. An evangelist is one who is called to preach the gospel primarily to the unsaved. The “gospel” is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and is therefore the first line of ministry to those who are unsaved.

Evangelists are not often “Pastors” of local congregations because most of those within the local church should already be saved. And yes, it is true that there are many who sit in the pews each Sunday but are not saved, and because of that the “gospel” must always be a part of a worship service. But again, for the most part, “evangelism” is a ministry that is in addition to the efforts of the local church.

I have run out of time for today, so the Lord willing, I will pick up again next Sunday. But please do read through these lists of Spiritual Gifts, because it is ever so important for you to know the “gift” and the “calling” that God has placed within your heart. And unless you seek God’s wisdom about it from these scriptures, you may never know. And you will forever be disappointed in what you have missed out on. These words again . . .

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