

Gifts Of The Spirit

Ephesians 4:8-16

8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

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, 13 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; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 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. (Ephesians 4:8-16))

One of the frequent recurring points of emphasis within the calling that God has placed upon my heart in ministry is to continually remind all who will listen that God really does have a "plan" for our lives.

You have, no doubt, heard that constant refrain in many of these weekly messages. And you will hear it again today, because each of the words that I have just read in this passage bespeaks that truth.

Each of us in this congregation has publically confessed the Lord Jesus as Savior. And from that very first moment when we received Him as Savior, He began to set us apart for His plans and His purposes. Again, these words in Isaiah 43, verse 1 . . .

1 . . . "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. (Isaiah 43:1)

These words clearly tell us that God is very intentional. He has called each one of us by name and has redeemed us; and not simply so that we could enjoy salvation. Yes, redemption does serve that end, but our redemption was for a far greater purpose . . . so that we might be about carrying forward God's plan all of those matters that Jesus left still lacking when He returned to His throne in heaven. Those words in Colossians 1,

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24)

Simply put, as Jesus returned to heaven, He intentionally left much to still be accomplished. And He specifically appointed us, His Body, the church to carry out those responsibilities, both with each other and on out to all the world.

In our salvation, you and I were elevated to the exalted position of sons and daughters of God. And as sons and daughters, we have responsibilities, responsibilities within the family that must be attended to. And that is our calling.

And to carry out our calling, God has given us a special kind of enabling power by uniting us together first with Christ and then also with each other, the “Body of Christ”. Individually, we can do only so much. But united with other members of the “Body of Christ” and equipped with the gifts of His Spirit, we can do far greater things. Those words of the Lord Jesus in John 14,

12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.
(John 14:12)

Again, by ourselves, we can do only so much. But united with the Lord Jesus and with other members of His Body, and equipped with the gifts of His Spirit, we are able to do far and above anything we could hope or imagine.

I realize that all these words are strange and mystical, hard for the ordinary mind to comprehend, but it is all so very true. And to the extent that we join in and allow God’s plan to work itself out in the matters and circumstances of our daily lives, both the individuals within the body and the whole body itself can become a wonderfully working mechanism of God.

And that is exactly what we are reading about here in these words of our text. My question for each of us this morning is, “Are we ready to step on forward and get about this next part in the loving plan that God has put into place in our lives?”

Again, God is saying to us here, “For every part of my plan to prosper, all that will be required of you is that you simply “surrender” your hearts over to Me. I will do the rest.” I have called each of you “by name”. Do not be concerned about what you will do or how you will do it. I have taken care of all of those matters and details. I have placed a special “calling” within your soul. And I have given each of you very special gifts to enable you to carry out your calling. You have everything you need for all of life and godliness.”

“I want some of you to be “Apostles”, going out, with great authority, to declare the “good news” of the kingdom of God, establishing churches and bible studies and mission efforts.”

I want some of you to be “prophets”, filled with the living word that I have placed within your minds. And you will “give forth my word” to everyone you encounter. And no, many will not listen to you. They did not listen to my “prophets of old”, or to my dear Son, but you must give forth my word anyway so that they will be without excuse on that great and terrible Day of Judgment.”

“I want some of you to be “evangelists”. Like the “prophet” you also will give forth my word, but you will be sent especially to those who do not believe. You will give the gospel to them without hesitation and without concern for your own abilities to speak. The power within the gospel comes directly from My Own Holy Spirit. I will do all of the work that is necessary to be done. As my servant Paul said,

16 . . . I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16)

“I will call some of you to be Pastors, those who will “shepherd My sheep”. I am the “Great Pastor” of all of you, my sheep, and I know of the troubles you will encounter as you work to keep my sheep safe and well-fed. And I know about the wandering ones, those who by their nature will drift off into dangerous and destructive places and beliefs. But be of good cheer, the gifts I will put within you will help you do all that you will need to do to nurture them.”

And Pastors, while not all of you will have need of the gift of “teaching”, I will give that gift to most of you, because it is an especially needful gift for those who feed my sheep. My Word can often be difficult for the natural mind to understand. And with your spiritual gift of teaching, my words will become clear and plain to my other sons and daughters who are listening.

And I will give many other gifts to my beloved children. So that the church can be established and run in an orderly manner, I will give to some the gifts of “leadership” and of “administration”.

To others within the church, I will give the gift of “faith”, to others the gifts of “wisdom” and “knowledge”. To some, I will give the gifts of “compassion” and of “exhortation” and of “serving” and of “helps”. To others I will provide special sums of money and give them the gift of “giving” so they can pass it along to those in need.

Some will be given the gift of having a “discernment of spirits” and they will know when the word of God is being given as it is intended, or if it is being corrupted by demonic spirits.

Some of my gifts will be especially hard to understand and to accept. And because of that, divisions will arise among the brethren. My gifts such as, “healing” and “miracles” and “tongues” and “interpretation of tongues” will be embraced by some, but denied by others.

I don’t want my beloved children to argue and disagree. It truly “grieves” My Spirit to see them quarrel so. The Body is most blessed when it thinks and works together in unity, knit together and held together by My Spirit.

And so, as a loving Father, I have covenanted to send My Spirit to mediate your quarrels and to bring humility and surrender into your hearts.

Folks . . . This is what God is saying and doing in the life of the church and in our lives, personally. Isn’t He so very, very good to us! These precious “gifts” are given from the heart of God to our own heart, with each gift intended for our good and for the good of all those we will encounter each day. As these words tell us . . .

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 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; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ-- 16 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. (Ephesians 4:12-16)

As I thought about these words, my mind went to an old television program called the “Millionaire”. Each week, in that program, a wealthy benefactor gave one million dollars to a person. The intent of the storyline was to observe the changes that would take place in the lives of those who received that great gift. Some did well, but other did not. Often, the gracious gift was misused and squandered.

And so it is with these special gifts of God’s Holy Spirit, beginning with the eternal gift of salvation. It seems that some of us can systematically misapply and misuse and squander every special blessing that God’s gifts were intended to accomplish; and most

often for the very same reasons that the people on that television program failed with their gifts . . . “self”. “Self” exerts itself and takes charge, using or else hoarding the gift for our own benefit.

And it becomes much like the “manna” that God gave to the Israelites in the Wilderness. Recall that if each person took only what they were supposed to take, then the manna blessed them and served its purpose. But if they took more than they needed, it molded.

Unfortunately, too often, we find ourselves guilty of that kind of sinful behavior. Pure and Holy gifts from the hand of God are wasted, or worse become an instrument of destruction for us and our fellow believers. How dare we do such a thing, misuse and corrupt such pure and holy gifts? But somehow we often do! Instead of stepping forward into this new and blessed plan that God has for us, we step back into the world we came out of.

But folks it does not have to be. Thanks be to God, we truly do now have everything we need for life and godliness. We are no longer a part of the “world system” that once controlled our lives and behaviors. We are now securely in Christ and are a part of His precious Body, knit together in Him, each of us having a special purpose within His plan.

In 1 Corinthians 12, God gives us a description of how He has “fit” us into the Body of Christ by using a comparison to the human body. Listen . . .

12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free--and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 but now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. (1 Corinthians 12:12-22)

And in verse 25 . . .

25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)

In these words we are able to see God's full intent for us as we are joined together as "one" in the Body of Christ. We each are very different and have been given different gifts. And we are to use our gifts for the benefit of the whole body. There should never be a "schism". It is as simple as God makes it here. Can my eye say to my hand, "I have no need of you".

And no, not every person in the Body of Christ is as pleasant as some of the others, both in looks and in conduct. Recall that the prophets of old were seldom well thought of. They were often feared, but not often well-liked.

So it is in the Body of Christ. The "leaders" and the "administrators" must love and embrace the gifts of the "helpers" and the "servers". And any who lack understanding must willingly seek out the ones with the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, and on and on. I hope to spend one more week considering these special gifts from God, and the Lord willing we will continue next week.

But for today, may we close with these words from verse 12? We are each given "gifts" 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:12)

Praise be to God