

VIII. Spiritual Gifts in Biblical Perspective
Discovering, Developing and Deploying our Spiritual Gifts
“Spiritual Gifts – Unity in Diversity, Part 1”

Ephesians 4:1–16

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To set up this study I want to read the conclusion of Ephesians 3. This is God’s Word for the people of God to the glory of God, by the grace of God in the hearing of the people of God. Ephesians 3:20-21 says [20] *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

Have you chosen a life verse? This isn’t a requirement to be saved and I’m not saying you need to do this. My life verse is Matthew 6:33 which says [33] *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* When the Lord gave me this verse, I was pretty excited about it and my whole Christian life has been trying to get ahead of my wife somewhere since I’m supposed to lead her, so I went in to tell her. I said ‘Hey honey, I have a life verse, do you have one?’ She said that she did but I apparently didn’t beat her at this one and then she said to me ‘Honey what is yours?’ I told her it was Matthew 6:33 and quoted it to her and then asked her ‘what is yours?’ I figured it would be better. She had a smile on her face, opened her Bible and showed me the front page where her life verse was Matthew 6:33. I thought perhaps this was a seal upon our marriage but I do know that if I asked this next question perhaps everyone reading this would answer yes.

Are there verses in the Bible that were life changing for you? My response to this would that I could immediately go to a lot of them. Some that come to my mind right now are Matthew 10:13-14, Galatians 5:21-6:4 and especially the one we are looking at in this study, Ephesians 4. The reason Ephesians 4 is so meaningful to me is it happened in the 1970s as I was just getting out of college and going into seminary. As I got into ministry a person said to me that they wanted to be an encourager to me and gave me a little book that really helped them plus the series of sermons on cassette tapes this book came from. The pastor who did these sermons was a man named Ray Stedman and the series was called Body Life – the life of Christ in the body of Christ and how it’s manifested in a local church. That was life changing for me.

I had never felt comfortable with the term reverend or even the term minister because I knew everyone was supposed to minister, but then I got the term I was looking for from this Ephesians 4 text that enabled me to label my vocation and calling and I’ll give you the term in part 2 of this study. Ephesians 4 was such a life changing text for me in terms of pastoral ministry.

To recap just a little, I Peter 4 gave us the five framing principles, I Corinthians 12 gave us the ten understanding principles and then Romans 12 gave us the connecting tissue of spiritual gifts and the stewardship of them – how to discover, develop and deploy them in the body of Christ. This Ephesians 4 text has the five essentials necessary for the stewardship of our spiritual gifts as Christians and as the body of Christ. Before we dive into this text here is the distillation of the previous three texts that we have already studied. A spiritual gift is a God-designed and a God-delivered ministry resource to be used for God’s glory in concert with other believers

enabling Christ's church to effectively exalt Christ in Gospel words and deeds to exalt Christ as we are on mission, on message and in ministry, as we fulfill the Great Commission that has been assigned to us – God's people.

Ephesians 3:20-21 says [20] *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* This is the last two verses in Ephesians 3 and it is a doxology, a statement of praise to God. The power of the Holy Spirit is at work within us so that we as the body of Christ might exist in word and deed to His glory. When it says 'throughout all generations' it means it that the work of our great God is unstoppable and irreversible through the Gospel of Christ and when generations cease and we're in eternity in the new heavens and the earth it continues forever and ever and then we do declare amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 is a concluding doxology of the first three chapters of Ephesians that began with a doxology in Ephesians 1:3-14, which is 228 words in one sentence. The first five verses on Ephesians 1:3-14 praise the Father, verses 7 through 12 praise the Son and the last two verses praise the Holy Spirit. The praise of the Father ends like this in Ephesians 1:6, *to the praise of His glorious grace.* The Father authors our salvation and praise to the Son who accomplished our salvation ends in Ephesians 1:12, *in Christ might be the praise of His glory,* and then the praise to the Spirit who applies our salvation also end in Ephesians 1:14, *to the praise of His glory.* It is worship, worship, worship for that is why God made us, saves us and sustains us. All of that doctrinal Trinitarian doxology, Paul couldn't even put a period for it's all one sentence to the praise and glory of the Triune God.

Then for the rest of Ephesians 1 and all the way through to the end of Ephesians 3 Paul keeps repeating 'in Christ,' 'Christ in you,' 'you in Christ,' 'in the beloved One,' and 'accepted in the beloved One.' This is Gospel short-hand and Gospel short-hand is union with Christ. I am in Him, He is in me, we are in Him, He is in us, He has saved us, searched us, secured us, seals us, sends us, sanctifies us – and that is the Hope of Glory. And nothing can separate us from the love of Christ so it's no wonder that Paul ends it with a doxology. This is Paul's pattern. Paul gives us all the Gospel blessings that belong to the elect in Christ in the first half and then in the second half Paul tells the elect what they are to do with their lives for Christ.

The reason he does it this way is because we constantly have a tendency to think that what we do we do for salvation instead of what we do we do for Christ. We are constantly trying to get our works into our salvation. Our works are not what allows God to save us, to keep us saved or adds to our salvation. Jesus' work on the cross has done it all and it's His present work that keeps you in Him. Nothing will separate you from the love of Christ because He won't let you go. Jesus promises in John 10:28, [28] *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*

So why do we do what we do? It is because of worship for obedience is the act of the love of God's people to the love of Christ to the praise of His glorious grace. Our obedience is the evidence of our salvation and the instrument whereby we praise our Savior. Jesus says in John 14:15-17, [15] *"If you love Me, you will keep my commandments. [16] And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, [17] even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."* That is why Paul never tells us what to do for Christ until he tells you what Christ did for you. Now Paul is ready to turn to part two of his sermon in Ephesians as we look at Ephesians 4 – now what shall we do?

There was a homiletics professor that said to his class ‘I want you to know after you graduate from my class, and you’re sent out into the ministry I will find out what church you are serving in and I will sit on the front row where no one can see me except you. When you have finished expounding the text, I will hold up a sign that says ‘so what?’ meaning what does this mean, how does this impact your life?’ Paul is ready to tell us again. We saw this in the last study when we looked at Romans 12. Romans 1 through 11 we could say ‘so what?’ and Paul starts off with Romans 12:1 that says *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* He urges us to do this after spending 11 chapters praising God for the Gospel and then tells us how to live to the praise of God.

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians so now what do you do who are in Christ do with your life for Christ? Ephesians 4:1-3 says *[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* This is how He wants us to live.

So, what is the very first essential we learn about spiritual gifts? It is the stewardship of the Christian life. What does it mean to be bought with the blood, brought by the Spirit, clothed with His righteousness, to be accepted in the beloved? Before you can even contemplate spiritual gifts and the stewardship of spiritual gifts, you have to contemplate what it means to be alive spiritually in Christ. You are in Christ and Christ is in you. There is a play here with words and concepts that is highly intentional and intensified. Paul for three chapters has told us what it means to be set free in and through Jesus. Paul now identifies himself as a prisoner, a captive. This is so glorious I can hardly stand it.

Here I was a slave to sin, to Satan, to the world, to death and to the flesh. God’s common grace kept me from being as depraved as I would be but I was totally depraved. I was living as a cosmic rebel against the Almighty and it wasn’t about His glory but about me. I was dead in those sins and then Jesus came. He died on the cross for me sins, paid the penalty, met my captors, defeated Satan, death, the flesh, hell, and the world at the cross and rose Christ the Victor. He has emancipated me and now I am captured by His grace and love. I am not my own, for I am His. Stewards own nothing, but are completely owned by Christ. No longer can the fear of death enslave me. No longer can the fear of life enslave me or my guilt and shame.

He has removed that guilt and shame and the shower of His grace, and the washing of the His blood has set me free. Boldly I stand in Christ alone. In death, all I have to deal with is a shadow. I no longer enslaved to the power of sin for if any man be in Christ (born again) he is a new creation for the old has passed away and the new has come (II Corinthians 5:17). Such were some of you but you have been sanctified and justified for He has done this glorious work. Now the grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of Christ captivate me. Hallelujah, what a Savior! This is freedom. Praise His name forevermore. What does it look like to steward your life that you have in Christ? Here is the life of the steward who is going to steward the gifts and we get five elements of it.

Number one is, it’s a worthy life. Live a life worth living. It is not found in the empty idols of the world or the depravations of sin. It’s not found in the idolatry of appetites or the gilded toys of dust. It is not found in the number of zeros in a bank account or the number of square feet in a house. It is not found in the number of titles in our job. That which is a worthy life is found in the life that is lived for Christ, whether God has put me to dig ditches or be president or king of the nations in which He is King of Kings. Every believer lives a worth life.

Sometimes I'll hear people say 'well, he is just a mere human.' As C. S. Lewis says, you have never met a mere human for everyone you meet has been made in the image of God. There is nothing mere about it and you have never met a mere Christian. I understand what C. S. Lewis meant on mere Christianity but you haven't met a mere Christian for they are trophies of grace, secured by Christ, planted and put where He wants them. Wherever He has put you shine as the lights of God's grace and glory.

The text doesn't say to walk in a manner worthy to be called but it says to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. The worth necessary to call you doesn't come from you or me for it comes from Jesus. Worthy is the Lamb. It is because of His worth, we can now live lives worthy to honor the Lamb with our lives. Our lives will be imperfect and unlevel but our lives can be intentional lives worthy of our calling. Embrace a worthy walk that brings glory to God. Embrace a gracious walk. We are to walk in humility and gentleness for the worthy life is not about us. It's about Him. Live the life of John the Baptist who said 'He must increase and I must decrease (John 3:30). It's not you hope Jesus gets more glory than you, no! Your life is all about Him so in order for Him to increase than you have to decrease – not decrease in effort or commitment to excellence or in intentionality but increase in intention because it's not about you. It's about Him in you and you in Him so that He is lifted up in all of your inadequacies. He is lifted up from you.

So, we walk the worthy life that is manifested in a gracious life that is seen in a patient life with patience. Sometimes the reason that we are impatient is because we just can't wait for the next thing or we don't want to miss anything. I think the term today is FOMO – fear on missing out. We are patient because we know the best is always yet to come. I don't have to hurry up anything because God's timing is perfect. The adversary's work against me will end at the right time. My God is sovereign and always at work. He will take me through the suffering and the adversity as He gives me joy in the blessings to give Him the glory. I'll learn to trust Him in everything but I can be patient just like Job in the midst of a broken world, because in this world and the world to come I know the best is yet to come.

This is also a loving walk. As we want to be valiant for the truth, we need to be victorious in love. We need to be virtuous in love. The Bible says that because of twisting, denying and walking away from the truth, in the body of Christ on this side of eternity there will be divisions. Paul says he knows there will be divisions because of those who abandon the truth (I Corinthians 11:19). There must never be divisions in the body of Christ because of the absence of love. Love covers, love consoles, love is worthy, gentle, patient and humble.

The emancipated believer also has a walk that maintains the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We don't create unity for only Jesus gives us unity, and the Spirit of God makes us one in the body of Christ for He dwells within each one of us. We then through the power of the Spirit are to maintain and mature the unity of the Spirit which our God has given to us. The word 'bond' can also be translated belt and a belt ties things together. Our belt is the belt of peace. We have peace with God, the peace of God and the Prince of Peace at work within us, therefore through the Gospel of peace we then work to maintain the unity – the peace and the purity of the church through our distinct efforts, but we will never be able to do that until we have been emancipated from ourselves, our sin, our guilt and shame. Once we are emancipated we're captivated as prisoners of the Lord for this kind of a walk – worthy, gracious, patient, loving, maintaining the purity of the body of Christ and its unity through the peace and the bond of peace.

I want to give you a second element and the other three I will give in the next study. Secondly, we have unity and diversity, the stewardship of the church. What is the stewardship of the church? Let's look further in the text.

Ephesians 4:4-7 says [4] *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

Look at our unity. We don't create it, we inherit it. We have by God's grace, one living Hope, a blessed Hope, a coming Hope and that is Jesus Christ our Savior, our Lord, our Emancipator. Our hope is in Christ. He is the blessed Hope that purifies us. It is Christ and His redeeming work that He really saves us from our sins. He has saved me from power, the penalty, the persuasion and the position of sin. He is saving me from the practice of sin. When He comes back or brings me to be with Him, He will save me from the presence of sin, even the ability of sin and all of the consequences of sin – no sorrow, no guilt, no death, all tears wiped away, because in Him He is our living Hope and our Hope forever and ever.

I'm so glad I don't have to preach a message of a man-made religion that only offers the therapy of how to cope but I can preach the Gospel of saving grace in Jesus Christ which is the everlasting promise of hope for in Him you get a new heart, a new life, a new record, a new family, a new home and in Him you have eternity forever and ever. That is the Hope that is secure and Christ's church is built on that hope, not on what I want to make it or want it to be, but what He has made it to be as the risen Savior.

This unity has one Lord, not many. Yes, He will use leaders in your life and we'll touch more on that in the next study, but we have one Lord who is over all and Lord of all. That is Jesus Christ. Our opening confession of the church is, Jesus is Lord! Jesus is the object of our faith. That faith in this text is not referring to the act of believing but it's referring to what you are believing and that is the Word of God that brings us to Jesus Christ. As the epistle Jude 1:3 says [3] *Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for **the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints**.* It is the inerrant, sufficient, infallible, everlasting truth of God's Word that brings us to Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Now the text says, one baptism, what's that mean? I do not think this text is talking about water baptism. I want to take you back to John the Baptist for he gives us the clue as to what this baptism is referred to in Ephesians 4:5. It is the baptism of Jesus. There are two of them. John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and before he pointed to Him John the Baptist says in Mark 1:7-8, [7] *And he (John the Baptist) preached, saying, "After me comes He who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. [8] I have baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."* Jesus will baptize His people with His Spirit but He will baptize those who are not His people with fire. Jesus will have two baptisms – those in Christ (baptized with His Spirit) and those who are not in Christ (baptized with condemnation). He baptizes us with His Spirit to secure, seal, sanctify and send us in salvation. Those who have rejected Him, apart from Him are the chaff and are baptized with the everlasting condemnation of the fire of hell, itself.

Do you believe that Jesus baptizes you because of the grace of God with His Holy Spirit and secures you, seals you, sanctifies you and sends you? Do you believe that the wrath of God will baptize all apart from Christ with unquenchable judgment in which the worm dies not from all eternity? I believe that if we believe that then we'd be unstoppable in evangelism. To use

Paul's language here, we would be urged to rescue the perishing, to care for the dying for Jesus is merciful. We have one God who is over all, in all and through all and there is our unity.

Ephesians 4:7 tells us that each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. I love the unity that God has given us. I love the uniqueness of how God works on every single one of us. Did you know in creation that none of us are alike? You might be thinking, 'what about identical twins?' They are not identical. They are close but not identical. Go check their fingerprints. There are many who are similar but every one of us are unique. Our spiritual gifts are unique. The way He created you is unique. Unity is not uniformity. God has designed you in creation and God has designed you in your redemption. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, one hope – yes there is our unity, but boy has He not worked right within your life with specificity – uniquely, His timing, His working and what He is doing as He is conforming you to the image of Christ.

Have you noticed that all of the unity brings us back to Jesus? Who is our Hope? Jesus. Who baptizes us? Jesus. Who is the object of our faith? Jesus. Who is our Lord? Jesus. Who sent Jesus for us? One God and Father who is over all, in all and through all. This is glorious and He uniquely gives you a constellation of gifts that wrap up in a very spiritual gift that is uniquely changing throughout your entire Christian life as your sovereign God uniquely works in you and me, not to make much of us but so that we're free to make much of Him.

So, my invitation is very clear. If you and I are in Christ today let's walk for Jesus. We're not walking for salvation for He took that walk for us to Calvary. Let's just walk for Jesus the worthy walk, the patient walk, the loving walk, the peace and unity maintenance walk, celebrating what we are together in Christ – one Lord, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all, in all and through all – to Him be glory forever and ever. Then, take what He is uniquely doing in your life and bring it back to Him for His glory and that will become unmitigated joy in your life in Christ Jesus. What glory is ours by His grace? He didn't bring you to Himself by running you down an assembly line – stamp, stamp, stamp, etc. He went out and found you, sought you, searched you, saved you and He is working on you as He sanctifies you. We all have the same unified foundation and the same destination – oh the glory of the journey He is taking us on as we walk for Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time to spend in Your glorious Word and thank You for this marvelous text of Scripture. God, I am so glad I get rest in the Holy Spirit to overcome all of my inadequacies so Holy Spirit do Your work now. Please speak to that heart that has not yet come to Jesus. May they not walk in the world, the flesh and the devil, set them free that they may know the love of Christ and being set free, freely give themselves fully to Christ. If you would like to pray with someone about this decision please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with you personally and confidentially. Dear Savior, take my brothers and sisters, not simply by the hand but by the heart and may they rejoice in what we have together in Christ. Now, may we walk together for Christ as You measure sovereignly the work of grace in our life and I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.