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## **Misunderstood Gifts to The Church**

### **Ephesians 4:7-13**

**PowerPoint Presentation: None**

**Keywords: Spiritual growth, Fellowship, Maturity, Unity of the Faith, Spiritual Gifts**

**SermonAudio blurb:**

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. We move to the part of this drama Paul is unfolding where we enter the stage.
  - 1. We are invited to live out the truths that are taught in chapters 1-3.
  - 2. We are to embrace them, be transformed by them, make them our point of personal and corporate identity.
  - 3. And live them out. But what does this look like?
  - 4. Well the key for each of us is to begin to grasp the truth of the now and not yet idea Paul teaches here, specifically 2:6.
    - a. We are players in this drama of God. As 2:7 makes abundantly clear.
    - b. While here in this age and time we are to engage in the fight against the powers of this age its not as people of this age, but of people who are already present with Christ in heaven.
    - c. When that begins to connect in your mind more and more then you are better equipped to enter the struggle.
    - d. And I want to remind you that this struggle/battle is one that is essentially characterized by the mundane and boring. It is simply obeying the Lord's commands. It is dying to self and living in a self-giving manner toward others.
    - e. So if some of you are thinking that from Ephesians you will learn some way to have victory over everything and it will be exciting and mind-blowing, let me pop that balloon right now.
- B. Last week I tried to drive home two key points: How do we preserve unity of the Spirit. And what is the unity of the Spirit.

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1. At the core of this is that as part of this cosmic drama that God is playing out through His Church, we must grasp and maintain the unity that is ours simply because of the Holy Spirit and what He brings us into.
2. There were four things needed to preserve unity (shown in vss 1-3):
  - a. Understanding our calling.
    - (1) It is a corporate, or collective calling. He is saying to them and to us, that we as a church need to walk in a manner that is proper and fitting according to the one calling that all of us participate in.
    - (2) The Church functions like this monument to Christ's victory over the powers, then you will realize the importance of putting on a new set of actions and attitudes.
  - b. Second, by living in humility.
  - c. Third, by showing gentleness (meekness).
  - d. Fourth, by being patient—which results in putting up with one another, remembering what God has done for us on the Cross.
3. We finished by seeing exactly what the unity of the Spirit was in vss 4-6:
  - a. Three triads: The first related to the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The second related to the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - c. The third related to the Father himself.
  - d. The point of all of this was that word “one.” We have all come to the One Father through the One Savior and Lord by the will of the One Holy Spirit.
    - (1) We may not agree upon music, clothing tastes, worship styles, bible translations, and countless other things, but we all must be unified on these things in vss. 4-6.
    - (2) If a person comes in the name of the Lord, believing the true gospel, then we are to welcome them as a brother or sister in Christ.

## *Application*

Now, I ran out of time last week so I could not make this point. But it is important to note that the unity that is described here is such that there is no reason to see a problem in denominations and

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such. It is often said, especially in the RCC, that the fact that there are so many denominations that it is evidence that these churches and denominations do not belong to the true church.

But this is not the type of unity that is discussed in vss 1-6. There can be serious differences in points of doctrine and yet a genuine unity of the Spirit **IF** we are diligent to maintain it. As brothers and sisters in Christ gather in the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, independent Baptist, Brethren, and Community churches there is an essential unity that is occurring as we make our common confessions of truth as laid out here in Ephesians 4:1-6.

What happens to this unity is that it tends to go out the window as we seek to come into greater unity of the second type, part of which we will talk about today. Most of us have had the unpleasant experience of having some person who holds to a specific doctrine so strongly that they run roughshod over you. The conversation started out strong and ended in a tornado of destruction, with you lying on the ground under a pile of emotion, accusations, and name-calling.

(Point out that you can even leave a church w/o being divisive. If you are leaving for reasons of the faith, that you have come to greater clarity on)

So the challenge is to preserve this unity all believers have in the Spirit, all the while growing in a unity of the faith and a knowledge of Jesus Christ.

- C. Notice verse 13 with me for a moment. Notice that there is a time issue here, we see this with the word “until.”
  - 1. There is a task that needs the church is to be busy doing and it is not finished doing that task until two specific events have occurred:
    - a. The first is that the church attain to the unity of the faith.
    - b. The second is that the church as a whole attain to the knowledge of the Son of God.
  - 2. Now these two points are the heart of verses 7-16. Everything works around this goal. And it is a huge help for us because it helps show us the direction that we are to be moving in as a church.
  - 3. So let’s look at this passage in this manner—first, let’s understand the meaning of these two goals. Second, let’s then see how we are to grow toward these two goals.

## **II. Grow toward The Unity of The Faith and Knowledge of Christ (7-16).**

- A. What do these two goals mean?
  - 1. Unity of the Faith.

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- a. The term, “the faith” is a technical word in the New Testament. It occasionally refers to a person’s faith in God. But that is rare.
- b. The most common way this phrase is used is to refer to doctrinal truth. The term, “the faith” speaks of that body of truth that is gospel truth.
- c. Take your bibles and go with me through several passages to see this:
  - (1) Acts 6:7
  - (2) Acts 13:8
  - (3) Acts 14:22
  - (4) Acts 16:5
  - (5) 1 Tim. 4:1, 6
  - (6) 1 Tim. 5:8
  - (7) 1 Tim. 6:10, 20-21
- d. So the each local church is called by God to grow in the unity of the faith. This means then that we are to be striving to grow in a unity of faith and doctrine as a church.
  - (1) It is not a good thing to remain separate in beliefs and have many various beliefs.
  - (2) But it is also important to remind you that as we grow toward this unity of doctrine, we are to be careful to maintain the existing unity of the Spirit.

## 2. Knowledge of the Son of God.

- a. Twice Paul has mentioned in this letter about him praying that they would grow in the knowledge of Christ (1:17-19; 3:16-19).
  - (1) Note the supernatural work of God that is required for us to grow in this knowledge.
  - (2) It comes through a growth in sound doctrine, but it is not merely a knowledge of sound doctrine. You can know the Word and not have a sound nor deep knowledge of Christ.
- b. This point is no small thing for it was a passion of Paul that drove Him onward in His Christian walk as an individual (cf. Phi. 3:8-12).

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- (1) Point out that this also shows us that you can't just pray that God will give you this knowledge.
- (2) You have to strive after it.

## ***Transition***

So, these are the goals of the church. And any local church such as ours should be making them goals for themselves. A simple question we can ask ourselves is how does our activities, programs, and ministries promote a unity of the faith and a growth in the knowledge of our Lord.

Well, with this in mind, let us look the tools that God has given the church so that it can move in this important direction. And in doing so, we can also see the results that come as we grow in these two areas.

When you consider a new church these are simple questions to begin your search.

- B. How can the Church grow in this unity.
  1. First through gifted teachers of various types.
    - a. **Ephesians 4:7** "But to each one of us grace was given . . . ."
      - (1) Here Paul moves us away from the corporate/group unity that he spoke about in vss. 1-6 and into diversity within that unity.
      - (2) The word "but" could also be translated here as "in spite of this" or "on the other hand."
      - (3) In the prior verses he used the word "one" to stress the unity that we all have with one another.
      - (4) The question here is what is he speaking about in vs 7, what is this "grace" given to each of us?
        - (a) It is clearly connected to gifts by virtue of it is in accordance to the measure of Christ's gift.
        - (b) But the grace given here is not speaking of our individual spiritual gifts given by God to us as is discussed in 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Romans 12.
        - (c) Rather it is something else, specifically He has graced the Church and each of us individually through the giving of gifted leaders in the church.

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- b. Before he expands on this he gives this statement in vss 8-10 that is rather strange sounding to our ears.
  - (1) What is going on is he is giving the rationale behind the giving of these gifted leaders.
  - (2) He is quoting loosely from Psalm 68:18 but with one major difference. There it reads (follow in Ephesians to see the differences) "You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men . . ."
  - (3) Notice the key difference is Paul says that instead of God receiving gifts from mankind that Christ gave gifts to men. Why the change?
  - (4) The answer is rather simple when you understand that this letter is more than just a theological writing, it is a drama as I have been teaching over these many weeks.

What Paul is doing is something that is common when the New Testament writers references an Old Testament passage. He is using one verse to call to mind the entire story or message connected to that passage.

Psalm 68 is a psalm where God (YHWH) is portrayed as the divine warrior who conquers His enemies and blesses His people with gifts. And this is now brought into play again by Paul to show how God the Father, through the death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ is the divine warrior who has defeated the enemies of this age. And now Jesus, as the ascended victorious king, dispenses gifts to His people.

The phrase in vs 8, "He led captive a host of captives" speaks of that event of His victory over the powers and principalities that Paul has described in chapter 2. The descending mentioned is speaking of His incarnation and death/burial. He came to meet the enemy by coming down into this age as a man to destroy these powers. At the resurrection He then ascends again where is far above all things, especially the defeated powers of this age and now He gives gifts of grace to the Church.

This reminds us yet again of how the resurrection is everything for the Christian. Through it all the blessings we possess in Christ flow.

- c. So back to the grace that was given. Notice in verse 11 that the gifts that He has given to the church here are actually persons.
  - (1) This is different than in the other passages that talk about spiritual gifts.

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- (2) I don't want to go into great detail here on these offices. My plan is next week to deal with a couple of major movements in the Church today known as the New Apostolic Reformation and The Five-Fold Ministry.
  - (3) The office of apostle speaks to the 12 apostles as referenced in Acts 1:21-22, they were men who had been with Christ in His ministry and witnessed His resurrection. Along with them there was Paul who witnessed the resurrected Lord in Acts 9. But there were others who are referred to as apostles as well, men like Barnabas, James, the Lord's half-brother and Apollos. They were church builders. More than a church planter, they were in the forefront of the gospel work and had great authority and influence.
  - (4) The prophet was one who was gifted with revelation from the Lord for the purpose of building up the church, to communicate information from the Lord, especially as the New Testament was being written. They were to be a source of comfort and encouragement to the believers.
  - (5) The evangelist would be our modern day church planter. He would evangelize until he gathered together a body of Christians and then establish them in maturity and then move on.
  - (6) Pastor/Teacher. This is not two different groups but one. This speaks to those men who are gifted to lead, guard, and instruct a church. They are not usually planters, though they can. They are the ones who come in after a church is established to then continue to care and protect it through sound teaching.
2. What was the purpose of giving the church these people? Verse 12 gives us the answer.
- a. Christ said in Matthew 16 that He would build His church. And this passage describes how it is done.
  - b. The purpose of the giving of these people to the church is so that the church can be equipped to do the work they have been called to do.
    - (1) To equip means to make complete, to train to maturity.

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- (2) This is the work of any pastor. This is the first and foremost job, to be in the business of training the people to go and do the work of the Lord.
- (3) The church was never designed to be a place where you just let the pastor and a few staff members labor. Rather, it is a place where all believers become equipped so that they can work out their unique giftedness to serve one another.
- (4) This is something that you need to give careful thought to. Why do you come here? What do you think your leadership desires for you to be?
  - (a) We see you as a people who are seeking to be equipped, built up, prepared for ministry.
  - (b) MDF is not here to fill your minds or be a resting place. It is a training center.
- (5) And as the church serves one another in love they build up the body of Christ.
  - (a) This image is one of building a building. Starting with the foundation and building it up until it is finished.
  - (b) The New Testament frequently describes the church as the Temple of God. And this is the image being presented here.
  - (c) Here is a key point that is easily missed by you and it must not be. Your pastors and elders cannot build up the church of Christ. Only you can.
  - (d) Notice the flow, Jesus gives His church certain people to equip it. As the church is equipped it builds itself up into maturity.
  - (e) As this occurs there comes a greater unity centered around truth, gospel-centered, God-exalting, Spirit-empowered truth.
  - (f) But if the church accepts the equipping but does not use that equipping then the church is doomed to wander and become stale.



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- c. And this work of equipping the saint to minister to one another is to be done until the whole church is brought to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of Christ—in other words, it is never truly finished this side of heaven.
  3. The two purposes for the giving of these men (13).
    - a. There is a contrast that is being made in these verses.
      - (1) Mature man (singular) versus children (plural) in vs 14.
      - (2) The knowledge, wisdom and stability of an adult versus the ignorance, foolishness, and instability of childhood.
      - (3) The way to grow into this mature man is through speaking the truth in love. And as we do so we can begin to grow into the likeness of Christ.
    - b. The unity of the faith is where we become established in sound doctrine. We are able to discern false doctrine. We are not easily led astray. We value and delight in right theology. We rejoice together in truth.
    - c. The knowledge of the Son of God speaks to what we have already read in chapters 1-3. That the Church would have a full-orbed, rich, experiential, proper knowledge of Jesus Christ. That we would become established in Him, we would find our identity in Him and we would be known because of Him.
    - d. All of this is to move the Church as a whole into the state of maturity in which it rightly reflects the fullness of Jesus who is its Head.
  4. So all these gifted men are to be men building the Church in sound doctrine that is designed to point us every and always toward Jesus. They exist to bring the Body of Jesus Christ into conformity of His image.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. This is the goal of a maturing Church. To display the glories of Christ in our midst.
- B. We are moving in this direction I believe. But I also believe that we have a long way to go.
- C. This is said not to discourage, but to encourage us to not stop and rest, but to labor and strive to grow in a unity of belief and a knowledge of our Lord.

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### **Community Group Questions**

- **Discuss how lack of unity regarding doctrine has created problems in the church or even in your individual lives.**
- **What may be challenges that face you to see that these offices were actually gifts given to each of us? They are not merely positions or jobs but gifts given by Jesus.**
- **As a church how well do you see us growing into the unity of the faith? What are challenges? How are you helping? How can you help?**
- **As a church how are we doing in growing in the knowledge of Jesus? Again, what are the challenges? How are you helping? How can you help?**