

Sermon: Christ's Gifts to the Church Ephesians 4:7-12

Greetings Christ church of Wiesbaden!

This is our 8th week of online worship. Yes it has been that long.

I hope you are doing well and that these videos help you feel connected to the church.

It's kind of ironic that in such a time as this, our study over the last few weeks has been on church unity.

It's hard to express our unity when everyone is separated and sheltering in place.

Yet in this time, real ministry has happened and our family has been the recipient of your service.

As you are probably aware, my wife's father recently died.

And you guys have done a great job in expressing love and encouragement.

Thank you for all of your notes, letters, gifts and offers to serve us.

And in applying this to our study today:

I must say that your outpouring of love and encouragement is just one more example to Nora and me that the church really is the body of Christ.

You have shown us the love of Christ through notes, gifts and offers to serve.

I hope all of you are familiar with such expressions of love from the church.

Because, as believers, God has given us to one another to love and serve one another.

Today our Scripture study deals with this theme: the gifts that Christ has given to his church.

He has given us gifts individually and gifts corporately.

And all of these gifts are to serve one purpose: that is the building up of the body of Christ.

Everyone in Christ's church is gifted.

And this means that none of us in the church are useless.

One of the most painful feelings a person can experience is that of feeling useless.

Have you ever felt useless in the body of Christ?

I have.

We may at times feel that we are of little or no use in the church.

Yet as is so often the case in the Christian life, what we feel is often not in line with what God's word actually says.

Ephesians 4:7-12 teaches us that everyone plays a vital role in the church.

There are no expendable people and there is no such thing as **a useless Christian**.

You all have individual gifts and just your presence in the fellowship of Christ serves to encourage others.

So from the outset, I want to encourage you from God's word that you matter!

You matter to God and you matter to God's people.

And no matter how low you sink into depression, illness or poverty, you will always matter to Christ and to His body, the church.

How God is using you at this moment may not be readily perceivable.

Yet God is the one who has designed the tapestry of his church and every thread serves a purpose.

Every thread adds to the beauty, and **depth of meaning** in the tapestry.

So don't give up.

Don't ever say the church is not for you.

Don't ever view yourself as worthless.

You matter to Christ. You matter to his church.

And speaking personally, you matter a great deal to me ☺.

In Ephesians 4:7-12, Paul tells us about the gifts we have been given by Christ.

So let us read the text and begin our study.

Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. **8** Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? **10** He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

PRAY.

I. Every Believer Has Been Given Gifts By Christ (7)

You have a sermon outline and that is the first point.

Every Believer Has Been Given Gifts By Christ (7).

In verse 7, Paul wrote:

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Now this is a contrasting statement. He's contrasting what he said in verses 4-6.

In those verses, he wrote:

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.

Did you hear the theme word there?

One, One, One.

The stress is on unity. Oneness. Commonality.

Yet now in verse 7, Paul breaks from that theme a bit to show us that, just because there is unity in the body of Christ, there is not uniformity.

7 ...grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The focus here is on the diversity of gifting.

Notice that it says: **"according to the measure of Christ's gift."**

Each believer has a different measure and kind of giftedness.

It is an obvious fact in the church that not all believers are gifted in the same ways.

We are all so diverse and gifted in different amounts in different areas.

And no gift in the church can be discarded or absent without weakening the whole.

Paul makes this point at length in 1 Corinthians 12.

The Corinthian church had so many problems.

And one of their problems was that they had fallen prey to the worldly temptation of **taking pride** in their individual giftedness.

They saw gifts as being in a hierarchy.

Meaning that some gifts were thought to be of more value than others.

This is how our world measures giftedness.

Our world says, **"Your gifts and talents are only as valuable as what someone is willing to pay for them—that is, what you produce."**

So, the focus is on **money, prestige and power.**

A pop singer who produces music that millions of teenagers want to listen to **is seen as more valuable** than a teacher who helps students think and read.

The investment banker, lawyer or athlete who rises to the top of their game is seen to be more valuable than the average restaurant worker or government employee.

Our flesh tells us that the value of our gifting is in how much people praise us and how much money we can earn.

And when Christians fall into this way of thinking with gifting in the church, then harm is done to the body of Christ.

The Corinthians had fallen prey to such thinking.

They had a totem pole view of gifts where some gifts were seen as more valuable than others.

And Paul informed them that their perspective was all wrong.

Instead of gifts being ranked according to perceived importance and the attention they attract, we should instead see them as functioning as parts of the human body.

I want to quote Paul at length from 1 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 14:

1 Corinthians 12:14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. **15** If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **16** And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. **17** If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? **18** But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. **19** If all were a single member, where would the body be? **20** As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

1 Corinthians 12:21 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** ***On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*** **23** and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, **24** which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, **25** that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **26** If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

The main point here is that we are all one body.

And because of this, we should never see ourselves as more or less important than another.

One person's victory or usefulness in the church is the church's victory.

One person's suffering or struggle in the church is the church's struggle.

And this is because we are all one body.

Therefore as Christians, we ought to **give no quarter in our hearts to pride or coveting.**

Jealousy in ministry is a very real thing.

It's hard for church leaders to see others succeed when they themselves are struggling.

And it's hard for us as individuals in the church to see others praised for their gifts when our gifts and services are going unnoticed.

You may feel that no one appreciates your contribution in the church.

And it may be true that you are, in fact, being unappreciated.

Yet it is also quite possible that your need to feel appreciated in the church is a product of your flesh and not of the Spirit.

Covetousness and arrogance have no place in the heart of a Christian.

They are only destructive.

They are simply products of the flesh and of the devil.

So let me ask you, how have you fallen prey to the worldly view of spiritual gifts?

Do you view a Christian's importance in the church according to how much they produce?

Do you covet others who are more productive than you?

OR... do you rejoice in the gifts of others?

Do you thank God for the talents He has given them?

Because we are One body in Christ, the talents and victories of those who are more gifted or more useful are also our talents and victories.

We are in the end, one body.

26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

So, having taught us that every believer has been given gifts by Jesus Christ, Paul goes on to tell us about Christ's worthiness and ability to give these gifts.

And this brings us to our next point:

II. Proof That Christ Has Given These Gifts (8-10)

Now let me warn you that verses 8-10 are a bit confusing for a number of reasons.

First, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18 and he doesn't seem to get the quote exactly right.

In Ephesians 4:8, Paul writes:

8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he **gave** gifts to men."

Yet Psalm 68:18 says:

18 You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and **receiving** gifts among men...

In Ephesians, the verb is "**gave.**"

Yet in Psalm 68, the verb is "**receive**"

Give and receive have opposite meanings...

So what is Paul doing here?

Is this an instance of an error in the Bible?

No. Paul knows what he is doing.

He knows what the Psalm says literally.

Yet here Paul is **applying the Psalm to Christ and not literally quoting it.**

And this application does no violence to the integrity of the Psalm.

Because the main idea in Psalm 68 is that God is the victor.

He is triumphant.

And because Christ is the ultimate victor, all other victories in scripture ultimately point to him.

So Paul here is more **applying** Ps. 68 **rather than literally quoting it.**

And his point is that Christ came to earth and endured what he did in order to triumph and give us spiritual gifts.

Just like the victor in a battle receives the spoils of war, so Christ has conquered and now he has gifts to give.

So with that in mind, verses 8-10 make sense:

8 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

9 (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? **10** He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

These verses tell us about Christ's victory and his ability to give us spiritual gifts.

Jesus says this in another way in Matthew 28:18, just before he gives the great commission, he says:

Matthew 28:18 "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

The fact that Christ is the Lord and has all authority is what makes his mission doable.

And the gifts he gave us are for the purpose of the mission.

And we all have various gifts—both natural and spiritual- and they are to be used for the mission.

So are you consecrated unto Christ?

Are you "who you are" for him?

Are you using your gifts for the sake of his mission.

This is one of the reasons that, as a church, we are so zealous to have a Church facility of our own – whether purchased or rented.

A full time space would give more people in our church an opportunity to use their gifts.

Gifts of service, hospitality, teaching, community outreach and so forth.

So I encourage you to give to our general fund and to our building fund in the form of tithes, offerings and special gifts.

Your gifts today will allow your brothers and sisters in Christ tomorrow to more readily use their gifts.

It's all about His mission .

In verses 11 & 12, Paul lists for us some of Christ's specific gifts to the church.

And this brings us to our third point in the outline:

III. Christ's Gift of Officers to Equip the Saints for Service (11-12)

In verses 11 & 12, Paul states:

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, **12** to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

In these verse, Paul teaches us that the officers and leaders in the church are Christ's gift to the church.

Now, one of the offices for sure no longer exists.

And that is the office of Apostle.

To be an Apostle, you had to be a witness of the resurrection and you had to be commissioned by Christ, or the other Apostles as an Apostle.

And because of this criteria, there are no longer any Apostles living today.

This office served the purpose of building a foundation of doctrine for the church.

The second office mentioned is a contested office in the church and that is the office of prophet.

Some Christians believe that this office also has died out with the Apostles and the formation of the scriptures.

Others believe that the role of the prophet is still a functional one in the church today.

So there is a bit of disagreement among Christians about this office.

Yet I believe that we can all agree on two things that pertain to the office of prophet.

The first is that the scriptures have the final say regarding the teachings in the church.

No true prophet of God would ever contradict the scriptures.

I think we can all agree on that.

Secondly, God can speak however he wants.

And so this office could conceivably still exist.

If God wants to give any of his children direct revelation and speak directly to them, he can do so.

I think we can also all agree on that.

Yet we need to remember that every revelation should to be tested by the scriptures.

Now I am very slow to assert prophetic activity in the church.

I just don't see how this office can exist without the Apostles being present to regulate it.

Prophets are to speak the very words of God and we ought to be slow to believe anyone's thoughts or experiences rise to that level.

For to speak as a prophet is to, in a very real sense, add to God's word and that is something we should not do.

And so I believe it is best to see this office of the prophet as having been phased out with the death of the Apostles and the formation of the scriptures.

Yet there are three offices that remain- or two depending on how we count them.

And those are Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers.

Evangelists are ordained communicators of the Gospel.

The office is not clearly spoken about in scripture, but every time the word is used, there is the force behind the word that Evangelists are breaking new ground.

Evangelists seek to plant the gospel in soil that been untouched.

This is for the purpose of winning souls to Christ and incorporating them into the church body.

And so **church planters** are in a very real sense **evangelists**.

Missionaries are to be evangelists.

And the goal of evangelists should be the establishment of churches and the building up of the church.

In church planting, evangelists seek to transition from being an evangelist to being a pastor and teacher.

Now it is hard to know if the shepherds and teachers in verse 12 are two different offices.

A shepherd is a pastor and one of the main duties of a pastor is to teach.

Therefore, I tend to think both of these words refer to the same office- shepherd, pastor teacher, elder, overseer...

I think these are all different words for the same office.

Yet whatever we believe about these terms: Evangelist, Shepherd and Teacher- their function in the end is the same and that is:

12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

One of the pastor's main responsibilities is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

This means that Jody and I exist as elders and shepherds in the church in order to enable you to do ministry.

Our service is to enable you to serve effectively.

And this is done through teaching, through relationship building, through administration and organization, through leading and establishing vision.

Our job is to equip the saints in the church to serve.

And so the application of these verses is for leaders and laity alike:

are we using our gifts to serve in the church?

Are we consecrated unto Christ and his mission?

Are you "who you are" for Christ?

Have you given your life over to God, to be used by him in every way?

My experience: I am not as multi-talented as I would like to be.

I was never very good at math although I found it to be beautiful.

I am not good at working with my hands in building or fixing things as I would like to be.

My story of buying the old Jeep.

The bottom line: I am not going to ever make much money using my hands.

You may not all that you desire, but are you all his?

1. Take my life and let it be
Consecrated Lord to Thee
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise
Let them flow in ceaseless praise

2. Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee
Swift and beautiful for Thee

This time of isolation obviously makes using our gifts more difficult, but there is a way that we can all serve one another and that is through contact ministry.

We can still call one another on the phone and build friendships.

We can still write emails and other sorts of messages.

And when this period of isolation is over, we can serve one another through the ministry of hospitality.

Relationships are vital as we seek to build up the body of Christ.

Because it is through relationships that we find out what one another's gifts actually are and how we can serve others.

So let me challenge you to get in contact with others as a Christian-

That is, with the express purpose of encouraging the person you are calling or writing.

It can be people within the church and also those who are not.

Make it your purpose to encourage them.

Be a blessing through contact ministry

In this way, we can make the most of this strange time of isolation and build up the body of Christ.

Amen.