

The Pearl of the Epistles – Ephesians

Essentials for Growing the Church

Ephesians 4:7-13

Ephesians 4:7-16 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Introduction

In the previous verses, Paul stressed the importance of unity within the body of believers (3-6). In these next verses he is indicating that there are differences in each believer and as well as the gifts bestowed by God's grace.

The Apostle Paul has built the case for the church, its membership, purpose and the unity they should enjoy. All of that is wonderful, but just how do you become a member, discover your purpose and realize unity?

In this passage we find laid out before us the essentials for growth. Like any good team; football, baseball, hockey, soccer or basketball, there must always be leadership if that team is to be successful. Leadership is sometimes assigned. Other times it is earned. Still other times leadership is placed upon an individual by his/her peers. The Apostle says that it is crucial to have great and gifted leadership, a thriving discipleship program and maturity in the church to grow.

Essentials for Growth – Gifted Leadership (vv. 7-11)

“*But unto every one of us is given grace*” – Paul has taught us that the church needs to function and grow. The church needs grace so that harmony will prevail and the church needs special gifts so that it can live and grow.

Grace is one of Paul's favorite words. He uses it 110 times in his writings mostly to show the favor of God towards believers. Paul uses the Greek word *charis* conveying the idea of underserved, unmerited favor. This undeserved favor is given by Christ to the church. "For God so loved...that He gave." (John 3:16)

***Ephesians 2:8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

Salvation then is the first gift of God to the believers. The grace that God shows to mankind begins with His son in the form of an accepted sacrifice.

"...according to the measure of the gift of Christ" – These gifts then, are from God the Father, in the form of His only begotten son, Christ. As we will see, Jesus is at the center of every gift. This grace may signify an office (apostle, teacher, etc.). The grace is given in accordance with gifts of Christ to the church. The believer is to live a life of holiness. How do we do that?

- First we must acknowledge that grace is a gift from God and we have no part in obtaining it.
- Second the gifts are diverse. There is a specified amount given to each believer and it is not the same for each Christian. But it is enough for them to live holy lives.
- Third the gift is of Christ. The gift comes from Him. He purchased our grace and then gives gifts to His followers.

The measure of the gift of Christ does not refer to different levels of grace to obtain salvation. Instead it refers to the amount of grace given to individual believers to serve in the ministry of the Church.

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

I like the English Standard Version of this verse:

"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (ESV)

The Apostle Paul is quoting King David. Look with me at Psalm 68:18

***Psalms 68:18** Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.*

This Psalm is thought to have been composed when the Ark of the Covenant was moved from Kirjath-jearim to Mount Zion. As such it is a psalm of God's victory and triumph when the Ark was taken into battle as the Lord commanded.

So how does this relate to the work of Christ? We know that the Ark was the "dwelling place" of God on earth for the Children of Israel. God was between the two Cherubim on the Mercy Seat. When Jesus was born of a virgin, He was Immanuel – God with us. I believe Paul is alluding to this favorite psalm of the church to show that when Christ was raised from the dead, all those believers captive to sin were now made free through His shed blood.

(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

These two verses have generated some discussion concerning its meaning. Some say this means that Jesus went into the underworld at His death (1 Peter 3:18-22), while others attribute the descent as the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. But looking at the "text within the context" it seems apparent to me that this is speaking about Jesus descending to the earth from the heavenly throne room and then after the resurrection ascending back to heaven. Paul is speaking about gifts from the grace of God and John 3:16 is the proof text of these verses.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

And he gave some - Christ "gives" special spiritual gifts to those in the body of Christ who He has called to minister the Word of God. Then He gave them to the Church in order to fulfill their mission.

Those special gifts to the Church are: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. You might say that there is a prominent omission in that the office of Deacon is not mentioned. The purpose of the deacon was to take care of the administration of the body of believers. This list includes those whose calling is the dissemination of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This list seems to be the order of importance to that task according to spiritual leadership. Paul also used this same basic list in his epistle to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Note: as we look at this verse, let us understand that the purpose that God gave these men to the church (found in verse 12); for the perfecting, or equipping, of the saints for the work of ministry and building up the body of Christ. God has called people to positions of leadership and authority within the body of Christ for that reason.

Apostles - the word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means “one sent from or forth, a messenger, delegate”.

An apostle was a man who is qualified by the following; saw the resurrected Christ, and commissioned by Him for His service as an apostle.

After a thorough review of the New Testament, I am convinced that there are three main qualifications as a prerequisite to one become an apostle.

- First, had to have seen the Lord and been an eyewitness of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:22; 22:14; 1 Corinthians 9:1).
- Second, had to be specifically called by the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:5; Mark 3:13-14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:26; 9:15; 22:14-15, 21; 26:16).
- Third, was invested with miraculous power to perform miracles. This included the capability to bestow that ability to others individuals through the laying on of his hands (Mark 3:15; 16:17-20; Luke 9:1-2; John 14:12,26; 15:24-27; 16:13; Acts 2:43; 4:29-31,33; 5:12,15-16; 6:6; 8:14-18; 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6; Romans 1:11; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Prophets - This is a reference to New Testament prophets and not the prophets of the Old Testament. These men, like the apostles, were given specific insight into the doctrines of the faith by the Lord.

***Ephesians 3:5** Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*

They were under the immediate influence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which distinguishes them from teachers (1 Cor. 12:1-11).

Evangelists - The word evangelist is used only three times in Scripture. The root meaning of evangelist is “messenger of good tidings” or “to bring the gospel message.” While the role is not discussed very much, we can certainly see the definition of the word by the way it is used. Philip is called an evangelist because he went to areas of unbelievers, preached the Gospel, then planted churches (Acts 21:8). Paul instructed his protégé Timothy in all areas of ministry including “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5).

Christ gave the church evangelists. Paul was an evangelist. They were “soul winners” gifted with the ability to proclaim the Gospel to touch hearts. They were traveling missionaries that planted churches.

Pastors – The Greek word *poimen* is a shepherd. Jesus is referred to as the Great Shepherd of the church. Pastors are to watch and care for the church as a shepherd watches over his flock.

Isn't it a beautiful thought that the Great Shepherd, caring so much for his flock, the church, would give to the church shepherds to watch over His flock?

Teachers – The Greek word is *didaskalos* meaning an instructor, master. Jesus was known throughout the land as a teacher (Matthew 8:19; 9:11; 12:38; 17:24; 19:16; 22:16, 24, 36; 26:18, 25, 49; Mark 4:38; 5:35; 9:5, 17, 38; 10:17, 20, 35; 11:21; 12:14, 19, 32; 13:1, 14:45; Luke 3:12; 5:5; 7:40; 8:24, 45, 49; 9:33, 38, 49; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 17:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; John 1:38; 3:2, 10; 4:31; 8:4; 9:2; 11:8, 28; 13:13-14; 20:16)

The role of a teacher was to instruct or communicate doctrine to his pupils. This gift is different than those that prophesied or exhorted, their job is to instruct the congregation in the doctrines of the Christian religion.

Once more, isn't it a beautiful thought that the Master, wanting to ensure that the church would be instructed properly, gave teachers to communicate His truths to His flock?

Means of Growth – Discipleship (v. 12a)

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

The whole purpose of the gifts of Christ giving *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*, was to *perfect the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*. Christ gave gifts to the church for the benefit of His followers. The Greek word for *perfect* means to equip: as to “load on board a ship, outfit, or man”.

God has given all these men to the church so that the church might be brought to full maturation where there will be inhibitions. You see, the church is not to make a “nut” of herself before the world; she is not to appear ignorant before the world. All these men are to prepare the church so that the believers might do the work of ministering and building up the body of Christ.¹

Goal of Growth – Maturity (vv. 12b-13)

¹ McGee, J. V. (1997). *Thru the Bible commentary* (electronic ed., Vol. 5, pp. 254–255). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith – means where the Body of Christ becomes united in a state of perfection in the same truths.

of the knowledge of the Son of God – become united in our understanding of Jesus the Christ.

unto a perfect man – or we can say the complete man as God intends.

unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ – Stature refers to the growth of a man. And that growth should be closer to the image of Christ.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul continues his thread of unity into what Christ has given as gifts to the church.

These gifts were *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*. Apostles and prophets and their gifts are no longer needed as we have the full accounting in our Bibles. Paul implied that he was “last of all.” (1 Corinthians 15:8)

The purpose of the gifts of grace from the Savior was:

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Ephesians 4:12

The Apostle says that it is crucial to have great and gifted leadership, a thriving discipleship program and maturity in the church to grow.

Let us be about the Master’s work. “...*let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith...*” (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Robert C. Crowder