

Ephesians 4:7-16 Gifted

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Preacher: Rev Trevor Kane

[0 : 00] Let's turn in our Bibles then please to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. And we're going to read these verses 7 through 16. Verse 7 through 16 of Ephesians chapter 4.

We'll read actually verses 1 to 16 just to get the flow of what Paul's saying. But it'll be verse 7 through 16 that we're considering together tonight. Ephesians chapter 4 and beginning to read at verse 1.

This is the word of God. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

With all humility and gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There's one body and one spirit.

Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

[1 : 10] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says when he ascended on high he led a host of captives and he gave gifts to men.

In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the one who ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.

To mature manhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children. Tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning. By craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head.

[2 : 21] Into Christ. From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly. Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up.

In love. Amen. This is a reading of God's inspired and inerrant word. Turning our Bibles in the Old Testament this time to Genesis chapter 14.

Genesis 14. We are going to see in a few moments hopefully. How Genesis 14 is applicable. How Genesis 14 helps us understand what we read. In Ephesians chapter 4.

But for the moment we will read Genesis 14. We will read the whole of the chapter together. You see from the heading in the ESV. It is the section where Abraham rescues his nephew Lot.

Genesis 14. Beginning to read at verse 1. This is the word of God. In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar.

[3 : 26] Ariok king of Elessar. Chedlamanar king of Elam. And Tidal king of Goyim. These kings made war with Bera king of Sodom. Mbersha king of Gomorrah.

Shinab king of Adma. Shember king of Zeboiim. And the king of Bela. That is Zor. And all these joined forces in the valley of Sidim.

That is the Salt Sea. Twelve years they had served Chedlamanar. But in the thirteenth year they rebelled. In the fourteenth year Chedlamanar and the kings who were with him. Came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashtarith Kernim.

The Zuzim in Ham. The Emim in Shevla Kirithim. And the Horites in their hill country of Seir. As far as El Paran on the border of the wilderness. Then they turned back and came to En Mishfat.

That is Kadesh. And defeated all the country of the Amalekites. And also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon Tamar. Then the king of Sodom.

[4 : 25] The king of Gomorrah. The king of Adma. The king of Zeboiim. The king of Bela. That is Zor. Went out. And they joined battle in the valley of Sidim. With Chedlamanar king of Elam.

Tidal king of Goyim. Amraphel king of Shinar. And Ariok king of Elessar. Four kings against five. Now the valley of Sidim was full of bitumen pits.

And as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled. Some fell into them. And the rest fled to the hill country. So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah. And all their provisions and went their way.

They also took Lot. The son of Abram's brother. Who was dwelling in Sodom. And his possessions and went their way. Then one. Who had escaped. Came and told Abram the Hebrew.

Who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite. Brother of Eshcol and Vanor. These were allies of Abram. When Abram heard that his kinsmen had been taken captive. He led forth of his trained men.

[5 : 24] Born in his house. Three hundred and eighteen of them. And went in pursuit as far as Dan. And he divided his forces against them by night. He and his servants. And defeated them.

And pursued them to Chubah. North of Damascus. Then he bought back all the possessions. And also bought back his kinsmen Lot. With all his possessions. And the woman.

And the people. After his return from the defeat of Chedlamanah. And the kings who were with him. The king of Sodom went out to meet him. At the valley of Shava. That is the king's valley.

And Melchizedek king of Salem. Brought out bread and wine. He was the priest of God most high. And he blessed him and said. Blessed be Abram by God most high.

Possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God most high. Who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And Abram. Gave him a tenth of everything.

[6 : 23] And the king of Sodom said to Abram. Give me the persons. But take the goods for yourself. But Abram said to the king of Sodom. I have lifted my hand to the Lord God most high.

Possessor of heaven and earth. That I would not take a thread. Or a sandal strap. Or anything that is yours. Lest you should say. I have made Abram rich. I will take nothing.

But what the young men have eaten. And the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eschol and Mamre take their share. Amen.

This is God's inspired and inerrant word. Let's turn in our Bibles. Let's have our Bibles open please. At Ephesians chapter 4.

Ephesians chapter 4. And we're considering together these verses 7 through 16. Ephesians chapter 4. And verses 7 through 16. We have thankfully left the Christmas season behind us.

[7 : 28] But one of the things that Suzanne and I do each year as we come round to Christmas. As we're thinking about what we're going to get the boys and Eva for Christmas. Is that we'll sit down and we'll make a list. We have general kind of categories if you like.

Each child will get a toy. Each child will get a set of books. Each child will get a decoration. Now imagine if on Christmas morning.

Imagine if our children came downstairs. They gathered round excitedly. Ready to rip off the wrapping from their presents. And when they did so they found they were all the same. Not just the same categories.

Not just the same genre of present if you like. But exactly the same. Imagine if we bought four copies of the one book. And wrapped it up and gave it to each of our children.

Imagine if we bought four of the same bike and wrapped it up and gave it to each of our children. It would be madness wouldn't it? More than that it would be a waste of resources.

[8 : 27] No rather you give the children different gifts as suits their ages. You give the children different gifts as suits their interests and abilities. You give the children different gifts. All the gifts have the same source.

But each gift is different. All of the gifts come from us. But each gift is different. And as we come to Ephesians chapter 4 this evening.

As we come to these verses 7 through 16. As they speak to us about the spiritual gifts that God has given the church. As they speak to us about the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us each as individual Christians.

We are reminded that we haven't all been given the same gifts. We are reminded that we all haven't been given the same things. We have been given gifts depending on our age and stage.

Depending on our likes and dislikes. Yet all of these gifts come from the same source. All of these gifts come from the same person.

[9 : 27] And so none of these gifts are to be despised. We want to think about three things this evening. See three things tonight. Firstly, we want to think about gifts for all.

We want to be reminded how the Holy Spirit has given gifts to each individual Christian. Secondly though, we want to be reminded how the Holy Spirit has given gifts to the church.

Each individual has been given gifts, yes. But also the church of Christ has been given gifts for its good and for its upbuilding. And then thirdly and finally, we want to remind ourselves the purpose of these gifts.

They're given so that we might reach maturity. They're given so that we might progress in the Christian life. They're given not so that we can make money out of them. They're given not so that we can advance ourselves.

But they're given so that we might be mature. So that we might reach the full measure of manhood, if you like.

[10 : 25] The first thing we see, the first thing we want to think about. There we go.

That should be us. That should do us for the rest of the service. So gifts for all then is the first thing we want to think about. Gifts for all. And we see that in verses 7 through 10. So we finished last week Ephesians chapter 4.

We finished last week thinking about this great idea of unity. Paul reminding the church in Ephesus that they were united in Christ. That they were united together. We see that in verse 6, don't we? Paul reminds them of all the things that are one. They have one Lord, verse 5. They have one faith, verse 5. They have one baptism, verse 5. They have one God and Father of all.

Who is over all and through all and in all. He's reminding them of the things that bind them together. He's reminding them of the things that they share in common.

[11 : 41] But then as we come to verse 7, he almost seems to switch a little bit, doesn't he?

Because he's not reminding them of the things that are theirs corporately now. He's not reminding them of the things that are theirs together, if you like.

But rather, what does he say? Verse 7. Grace was given to each one of us. Now I know that there's a unity there.

There's a unity in the sense that grace has been given to each one of them. But it was personal, wasn't it? Grace had been given to each one of them.

Not that it was grace that had been given to the body. Not that it was grace that had been given to the group of believers. But that grace had been given to each one of them. It was individual to each person in the church in Ephesus.

That grace sought them out and found them. That grace sought out and found each individual believer in the church in Ephesus. And so it must be with us.

[12 : 44] We need to know that experience. We need to know that experience for ourselves of grace finding us. Of grace seeking us out. Of grace being poured into our lives.

It's often been said that God has no grandchildren. And that's what we see here, isn't it? Grace is an individual thing.

It's something that we need to experience for ourselves. It's not something that someone else can experience on our behalf. It's not something that someone else can know. And we can kind of tap into that knowledge.

We need to know grace for ourselves. We need to receive it for ourselves. And notice how that grace was given. Verse 7.

It was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. That's what grace is. That's where grace comes from this evening.

[13 : 45] It's the gift of Jesus Christ. The free gift of Jesus Christ. You see, grace wasn't something that the Ephesian Christians had earned.

It wasn't something that they worked hard enough for. It wasn't something that they pulled themselves up by their bootstraps to achieve. Rather, grace was the free gift of Christ.

Just as our children, when they opened their Christmas presents, it wasn't a result of their behavior over the past year. They were simply free gifts.

And so too tonight, grace is the free gift of Christ to each believer. Paul then moves on.

Verse 8. So we've seen the grace that is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Verse 7. He moves on then. Verse 8. Therefore it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

[14:48] This is a quote from Psalm 68. It's a psalm that we've sang already this evening. But there's a slight problem, isn't there?

Did you notice the difference between the words that we sang in Psalm 68 in the words that we read here in Ephesians chapter 4? What do we read here in Ephesians 4? Ephesians 4 we read, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

As we sang Ephesians, as we sang, sorry, Psalm 68, what did we sing? When you ascended up on high, you led out captives after you. From people you accepted gifts.

From those who were once rebels too. Now that's completely opposite to what Paul's saying here, isn't it? In Ephesians 4, Paul says Christ gave gifts. In Psalm 68 it says God received gifts, accepted gifts.

So how are we going to resolve this difficulty? The first thing that we might say is, Well, what Paul's quoting from here isn't Psalm 68.

[15:58] It's some other portion of scripture. It's some other thing that was kind of out there that the Ephesian Christians understood, but that we don't today. Okay. But I think the similarities are too striking to just write it off without any comment.

Others read what Paul writes here in Ephesians 4 and say that Paul's quoting Psalm 68 from memory. You know, he didn't have his copy of his Hebrew Bible with him.

And so he's quoting it from memory. And as he gets to that key word, he gets slightly confused. Instead of saying that God accepted gifts, he says that he gave gifts.

But this is Paul who's so proud of his Jewish heritage. This is Paul who'd learned from the feet of Gamaliel. This is Paul who had known the scripture since he was a boy. A Hebrew of Hebrews of the tribe of Benjamin.

I refuse to believe that he's going to misquote scripture. I refuse to believe that he wouldn't check what it said. Other people say, Well, this was what the rabbis taught at the time.

[17:06] This was their exegesis of Psalm 68. If you went to the temple and heard a sermon on Psalm 68, this is what the rabbis would say. They'd say that God gave gifts to men.

And so Paul then simply just kind of incorporates their exegesis. He incorporates their understanding of Psalm 68 into what we read in Ephesians 4. Again, I'm not convinced by that explanation.

Rather, I think Paul here is using the logical outworking of Psalm 68. Psalm 68, what is it? It's a psalm about God's foes being scattered. It's a psalm about God's foes being put to flight.

That's what we read in the first few verses of the psalm. It's a psalm of victory. It's a military psalm that speaks of conquest. And after the battle, after the spoils were taken in a military victory, the spoils would be split amongst the soldiers who had fought for that victory.

It was kind of only fair, wasn't it? They'd worked hard. They'd fought the battle. They'd been there. They deserved to share in the spoils. And that's why we read a little bit from Genesis 14.

[18:19] Genesis 14, I think, helps us understand that. We see Abraham going and rescuing Lot. We see the king of Sodom comes to him and says, Well, look, take your share of the goods. After Abraham has taken the spoils, after Abraham has brought back all of the possessions, the king of Sodom says, Look, take what's rightfully yours.

And Abraham says, Well, no, I don't want you to say that you've made me rich. Instead, I'll take what the men have eaten, and I'll take the young men. But that's it. So Paul here then is just going towards the logical outworking of Psalm 68.

He sees the reality that God has won the war. He sees the reality that God is the victor. And he looks ahead to the time when God would give the gifts to his people. When God would outpour the gifts from the battle to his people.

This is the distribution of gifts after the final victory has been won, after the spoils have been taken. It's a bit like when you win an award for work.

I presume. I've never won an award at work. But, you know, perhaps you win Accountant of the Year. Perhaps you win, you know, Rare Breeds Breeder of the Year. There will often be a delay between that bit of information coming out and the time when it's a reality.

[19 : 39] There will often be a delay between that information coming out and when you're crowned or coronated as that thing. From that point on, you can still call yourself Accountant of the Year.

But the reality hasn't become yet. And that's what happens here. Paul's looking ahead and he sees the reality that God is the victor. that all of the spoils are the Lord's and he looks forward to the day when God will pour out the spoils on his people.

Now, what do we say to that? Why have we spent ten minutes looking at that kind of obscure bit of Bible trivia, if you like? It would have been easy just to gloss over it. I'm sure none of you probably noticed.

I didn't really notice until it was pointed out to me. So why have we spent ten minutes doing that? Because we take God's Word seriously. Because we want to understand what's happening in God's Word.

We want to understand what the Bible's saying to us. We want to have confidence as we come to the Bible week by week that there are no contradictions, that there are no things in it that are wrong or errant.

[20 : 50] I want you to have complete confidence this evening in God's Word. To trust that the Word of God is true, is accurate.

And so when we come to difficult sections like that, we need to work it through. We need to understand what God's Word is saying. Paul goes on then in verse 9 to begin a section which is quite confusing in many respects.

As if Psalm 68 wasn't confusing enough. He says, verse 9, In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? Well, what does it mean indeed, Paul?

How are we going to understand that? One of our rules of interpretation of the Bible is that each genre influences how we interpret sections within that genre.

So this is a letter of Paul to a church. So all of the letters that Paul writes to churches, we can take as one and try and help us understand the more difficult sections. And as we read this, I think it reminds us of Philippians 2, doesn't it?

[21 : 59] That section where Paul speaks about the humility of Christ. Where Jesus thought not equality with God a thing to be grasped, but instead humbled himself. What does it mean when he descended into the lower regions of the earth?

Well, it speaks of Christ coming amongst us. Christ humbling himself. Coming amongst us. It's a reminder to us of that.

Donald MacLeod called it the divine condescension. And I can think of no better term. Jesus Christ who is all glorious. Jesus Christ who is all powerful.

Jesus Christ who is equal with God the Father and God the Spirit. Jesus Christ who was there at the beginning of time. Jesus Christ who is the second person of the Trinity.

Jesus Christ who is the eternal Son. Jesus Christ who is the golden ■ó ciudadano. Being man. As Wesley so memorably put it. Our God contracted to a span.

[23 : 01] All this. All this so that sinful men and women might come to know God. who was the one who was descended Paul asks in verse 10 who is the one who humbled himself was the one who ascended far above the heavens it's the one tonight who's seated at the right hand of glory it is the Christ these gifts for all then given by the grace of Christ given by the one who humbled himself secondly then we want to think about gifts for the church specifically gifts for the church specifically and we see that in verses 11 through 14 we move on from thinking of this gift of grace that Christ gives us individually to thinking about the gifts that he gives to the church as a whole we see that in verse 11 but notice again that even as we see that these are gifts largely given to individuals for the benefit of the whole church they are gifts that are given that are the outworking of grace in an individual's life for the benefit of the whole body it was Paul says verse 11 he that is Christ who gave the apostles and the prophets we want to deal with these two things on their own as they're slightly different to the rest of the list in that these are offices that we no longer have in the church we no longer have apostles because we have the final closed canon of scripture the full canon of scripture what was the purpose of an apostle an apostle was one who had seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ an apostle was one who had seen the risen Lord Christ and who was commissioned by him who was sent by him on a specific task so why do we no longer need apostles now that we have the full closed canon of scripture because we've all been put on to mission we've all been sent

with that task in Matthew 28 haven't we what's our task what have we been commissioned to do as believers in Jesus Christ take the gospel into the ends of the earth we're commissioned to take the gospel to the whole world so we no longer need apostles we have that commission from the Lord we have no need of prophets in a biblical sense again because the canon of scripture is closed there's no fresh revelation to come from God if you like in the biblical sense there's no need of fresh revelation from God he's shown us everything there is to say about himself everything God will show us everything God will reveal to us about himself for his son is contained in scripture now God can indeed and indeed does use other means but scripture must be normative for us scripture must test everything that we see and hear but in saying that what a reassurance it would have been to the church in Ephesus to know that the man who was writing this letter to know that the man who was so concerned for them was an apostle he'd seen the risen Lord Christ he'd been commissioned by the risen Christ so that's the first two gifts of the church we see verse 11 he gave the apostles the prophets and then he goes on the evangelists the shepherds and the teachers think of Philip in the book of Acts those who have been sent to speak the word where Christ is not known those who have gifts to do that he's given the shepherds and teachers those whose job it would be to care and pastor the flock of God those whose job it would be to lead those who were evangelized on in the Christian life but why has Jesus

given these offices to the church why has Jesus given these roles and functions to the church well verse 12 why to equip the saints for the work of ministry now this turns our idea of ministry on its head doesn't it because our idea of ministry I think can be well you're the professional we pay you you get on and do it we pay you to do the ministry we pay you to go and visit the sick we pay you to do the evangelism we pay you to do whatever it is that needs done yet actually according to Paul here my role as pastor teacher is to equip you is to build you up in your faith so that you yourselves can do the work of ministry so that you yourselves can reach out to outsiders so that you yourselves can show that pastoral care and concern that's what we often call every member ministry every member care for one another until Paul says until verse 13 we all attain to the unity of the faith remember he talked about that last week until we're all united around those central truths of who Jesus is until we're all united around those central truths of the gospel and what will happen well we'll reach mature manhood all of this happens

Paul says until we grow up I used to work in a fishing village in Northern Ireland called Anna Long and a lot of the men there would be fishermen they would be farmers they'd be men who were out laying curb stones they'd be men who did hard manual labour and I was always a little bit intimidating shaking hands at the end of the service on the door you know these men would come to you and they'd shake your hand and you'd felt like you'd lost your hand their hands were just so big it was like putting your hand into a bucket and these hands were rough calloused hands from working in the fields or working in the boats or doing whatever as a young lad it was hard not to feel intimidated as someone who sat by a keyboard all day it was hard not to feel somehow like less of a man but that's the image that Paul has for us here that we want to grow to maturity that we want to grow and reach full manhood if you like grown strong men that's what we're aiming for spiritually to be strong to be mature to be resolute that's what we're aiming for as a church and that's why Jesus Christ has given these gifts to the church so that the church might be mature and notice how this theme's continued then verse 14 verse 13 he says these gifts are given so that we might reach full mature manhood verse 14 so that we may no longer be children we want to be men not children we want to be mature adults not children tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every wind of doctrine we want to be steadfast we want to be immovable we want to be solid not like children but that's part of the reason why heresy is so appealing I think if you went to anyone who was a genuine follower of Jesus Christ and said do you want to be a heretic I'm sure the answer would be no but most of the time heresy looks so subtle it sounds like the truth 99.9% of the way false doctrine seems so appealing because it's only shifting a little bit from good doctrine our aim as a church is that we want to be those people who are steadfast on the truth who are immovable on the truth who recognize heresy when we hear it who stand firmly on sound doctrine and that's why Jesus has given these gifts to the church so that we can be stable so that we can be secure so that we can reach manhood might be a bit boring every week spending 30 minutes looking at the Bible but that's the surest way to be steadfast that's the surest way to reach maturity it's the surest way to grow so we see the gifts for individuals we see the gifts for the church and then thirdly finally tonight we want to think about the gifts for maturity and we see that in verses 15 and 16 so we don't want to

be tossed about verse 14 we don't want to be carried along by every wind and wave of doctrine we don't want to be unstable rather verse 15 we want to speak the truth in love we want to grow up in every way to him who is the head it's a lovely little phrase isn't it speaking the truth in love some of us perhaps are good at speaking the truth but not necessarily in love some of us are perhaps good at loving but not speaking the truth as Christians we're called to do both we're called to speak the truth because it's the word of God but we do so in love we're called to remind people of the truth of God's word but we do so in love so that we might grow into the head so that we might grow more and more like Christ from whom the whole body flows out but what's the main take away from tonight as we think about this section in Ephesians chapter 4 what's the main thing that we need to take away

[33 : 28] I would say it's this that the church needs you there are no unimportant Christians and there is no unimportant ministry we all need each other we all need to be exercising the gift of grace that God has given to each one of us if we want to grow as a church we need to be exercising our gifts so that the whole body can grow so what's your gift tonight what way has the Lord blessed you tonight that can be used by him it could be organization it could be helping set the chairs out it could be talking to those who are alone and vulnerable it could be that God is calling you to be a pastor or a teacher or an evangelist whatever it is don't think that that gift is unimportant don't think that that gift is any less significant because Jesus has given you that gift so that his body might grow

Jesus has given you that gift so that his body might become mature steadfast immovable not carried by every wind and wave of doctrine not tossed to and fro like a child with their father God has given you that gift the grace of Christ has given you that gift so use it to build up his body Amen all hand might go hand down a hand go hand hand hand hand hand