

Eph 4:11-16 The Purpose of Christ's Victory Gifts

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[0 : 01] In Ephesians chapter 4, our text for this morning will be verses 11 to 16. And so far in Ephesians, Ephesians 1 to 3 speaks about orthodoxy, that which you ought to believe.

And then 4 to 6, chapters 4 to 6 speak of orthopraxy, that which you ought to do. So in chapter 4, starting off in the transition into that which you ought to do, or doctrine according to godliness, Paul starts off with an appeal to keep unity.

The right practice adorns right doctrine. And that right practice, he starts off by talking with the right conduct of keeping unity. And then he goes on to talk about the nature of that unity.

That that unity is not originated by man, but that that unity is originated by the triune God. And that unity is one of salvation by God.

So we see in Ephesians chapter 1, from the eternal perspective, or from the perspective of the covenant of redemption, those whom are purposed by the Father, purchased by the Son, and claimed by the Spirit, or redemption applied by the Spirit.

[1 : 24] So we have this eternal perspective of salvation, and that salvation is required for this unity, but yet then it transitioned into the individual believer in chapter 2, or the covenant of grace.

And you he made alive. And this is key for the nature of that unity, is that being born again, that being regenerated, the working of the Spirit, effecting spiritual life into a dead sinner.

So without being made alive, or without being given new life, spiritual life, there is no Christian unity. This unity does not originate from man, but from the triune God. And then he goes on to further talk about the ascended Lord's victory gifts, and how in ancient Roman custom was after victory, after conquering their enemies, and the ascending to the capital, they would leave their captives or their prisoners in chains as they ascended up to the capital, and threw out coins to the common people as gifts to them out of celebration of their victory.

And so also, the Lord having, Lord Jesus Christ, having conquered sin and Satan and death and hell, ascended, and on his ascent gave gifts to men.

[2 : 48] So we will read Ephesians 4, verses 1 to 16. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, he says, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

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

And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men and the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

[4 : 27] But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share.

causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the time that we have this morning to consider your word.

We pray that indeed you would enlighten our minds and help us to truly understand the truths contained in your word. Thank you for divine testimony that we have in your word.

Lord, we pray that you would forgive us of all of our sins. We thank you that there is forgiveness in the shed blood of Christ. And I pray, Lord, that as we seek to understand the message contained in the text before us, that you would bless the ministry of your word and that you would be at work, attended by your spirit this morning.

We thank you for the incarnation as we have sung about and considered this morning, that fallen mankind who is dead in sin, in the sin-cursed fallen world, is without hope, apart from divine intervention, that the word eternal God took to himself a body and our nature in order to suffer and die in human nature, in our place to pay the ransom price, and was victorious over sin and death, raised from the dead, ascended on high with all power and authority.

[6 : 10] This morning, our Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you, our King, and look to you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, again, our text this morning is verses 11 to 16.

And what's going on in these verses, what this passage is about, is that the purpose of Christ's victory gifts is provision for spiritual health and growth to unify his church.

So, really, this is a continuation of the previous sermon of the ascended Lord's victory gifts, and now we look at the purpose of those victory gifts of the ascended Christ. So, we'll draw out three particular things, the function of the gifts, false doctrine that endangers, and growth in maturity.

So, the function of the gifts. In verse 11, which is the verse we concluded on in the previous sermon, is the verse we're picking up again on this sermon.

The gifts of verse 11 are, this is important, they are word-based teaching ministry by church leadership. It is a very specific focus of the gifts and the men in view of verse 11.

[7 : 24] So, again, that's the word-based teaching ministry by church leadership. And its function is to shape the church's unified growth.

And first, listed, if you notice in our text, so, our text is verses 11 to 16. We'll continually progress through it and come back to it, so keep your finger on there, and we'll be working out of that area. But what we see here in verse 11, first are listed the foundational, revelatory function of extraordinary offices. There's a lot of big words pressed together in that statement, but essentially, what's first listed is the foundational, revelatory function of extraordinary offices which do not continue.

And the latter two are the continuing and ordinary officers for the continued care of the church. They pastor the flock from, they pastor the flock through the ministry of the word, that is, to feed and to instruct pastors and teachers.

And of these gifts are listed for us three coordinate purposes of these church leaders. Now, something to note here you might be seeing, particularly in our versions, is that in modern English translations, a comma has been dropped where there's been a comma historically used in preceding translations.

[9 : 04] So these modern versions have dropped the comma which has historically been in use after the perfecting of the saints. And that is the position which I will take within this sermon, is that it would read perfecting the saints, comma.

This is important to note because the dropping of the comma does make it confusing of what that text is saying. And what's going on here is that this, this verse is what's called an accumulation.

And an accumulation involves the expansion of an idea in subsequent parallel phrases. So these three coordinate purposes of these church leaders are parallel phrases expanding the idea.

So what are those three coordinate purposes? These three parallel phrases, first of all, is the perfecting of the saints or equipping of the saints. The second is for the work of the ministry.

And the third is for the edifying the body of Christ. First of all, for the perfecting of the saints or for the edifying of the saints.

[10 : 20] This is towards perfect maturity. And when we consider the word perfect, and your translation, it might say equipping, it might say perfecting, but when we consider perfect or perfecting, it means to be complete, the completing process.

So to be working towards perfect maturity means that there is a complete and a perfect state and it is working towards it. It is progressing to a completion of maturity.

It's not arriving there, but it is working in that direction. Jeremiah 3.15 gives us some insight into what occurs. It says, And I will give you shepherds according to my heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

So first, for the perfecting of the saints. Second, for the work of the ministry. In Acts 6, verse 4, if you remember the context, it was when those in the teaching ministry of the word had too many tasks and so they appointed deacons in order to alleviate the tasks.

In verse 4, in Acts 6, it says, but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. So those in the offices of the teaching ministry of the church were to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word and alleviate themselves from the tasks that took them away from that focus.

[11 : 53] This is important to note because it was work and it was a lot of work and they needed to be able to focus and focus time on that work and not other things.

The work of the ministry is the work. So, four, the work of the ministry and then third, for the edifying of the body. In Titus 1.9, it says, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

So, these three coordinate purposes, the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body are the gifts of verse 11 which are the word-based teaching ministry by church leadership.

You'll notice it continues to say in the text until we all meet. This shows us the direction in which it is going. Now, the teaching ministry of the word, that is, the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, the edifying of the church is to continue until Christ's return.

So, there's the extraordinary offices which do not continue and the ordinary offices, pastor and teacher, which do continue until Christ's return.

[13 : 24] Now, this ministry is by way, according to our text, of divine gift. I'm going to pause there for a second and make a note about the fact that it is by way of divine gift.

Now, this can, in a sense, be an awkward text to preach on because preaching is a part of the teaching ministry of the word.

So, for somebody to stand up and teach through the teaching ministry of the word and say that those in the teaching ministry of the word are a divine gift, it can be awkward or perhaps come across as awkward and some might even twist it in a way to suggest themselves higher than they ought to.

We've definitely heard the phrase of somebody, when somebody has a high view of themselves, you've heard a person refer to them as they think they're God's gift to the world.

That is not the context in which this phrase is being used here. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's quite very humbling because it is a gift. Now, what is a gift?

[14 : 30] If I was to go in your vehicle and rummage through your glove box and pick something out and bring it to you and say, I've gave you a gift. It's not a gift. It's already yours. To give somebody a gift, they don't already possess it.

They don't already have it. You're incurring the cost in order to give it to them. So the fact that it's a gift is something that's not already there. It's not based on personal aptitude.

The gift isn't the person's personality. The gift in the teaching ministry of the Word is twofold. One, it's the Word of God and that has nothing to do with the man declaring it.

It's about God and God's divine testimony. The external means and the other is the internal means which is the Spirit of God making effectual the Word of God and the hearts of the people. The man that does it is merely the means through which God does this work.

So, the ministry is by way of divine gift and is Christ's provision for his church. The church, therefore, is not to redistribute and delegate to all the various members.

[15 : 35] This is specifically speaking about verses 11 and 12. The teaching ministry by church leaders or the pastor and teachers. So, if somebody is in the church office of pastor and teacher or pastor or teacher, then that which God has called them to in the teaching ministry of the Word, they are not to alleviate themselves of that calling and distribute it amongst all the people to take themselves.

It is the means through which God calls a person to use them for God to effectually accomplish his purposes. That is not to say that each member does not play a part because that is in verse 16.

We will see how that works out a little bit further. But specifically verse 11. So, these church leaders are given by Christ to fulfill the function of verse 12 until Christ returns and brings the church into complete maturity.

So, again, let us go to verse 12. to see the functions to be fulfilled for the equipping of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Now, the functioning of Christ's gifts prevent and repair instability caused by false doctrine.

[17 : 14] So, the function of Christ's gifts prevent and prepare instability caused by false doctrine. So, that brings us to false doctrine that endangers.

In verse 14, these gifts are given so that no longer children.

Now, think of the nature of children. What can be said about childishness, which we can then relate to children of the faith?

So, what can be said about childishness, or what do we know about children? Infants desire milk and not solid food. They desire to be entertained and not to work.

They're unstable in judgment. They are childish in understanding. They are unstable, susceptible, and fickle. They like novelty, excitement, and amusement.

[18 : 20] They want autonomy rather than authority. They dislike hard work and being made to think and reason. They are liable to be deceived.

They are liable to be carried away by every wind of doctrine, sometimes because it is novel and exciting, sometimes because it is blended with emphatic declarations of true doctrine, and sometimes because it comes from a relatable celebrity preacher, sometimes because it is plausible. they are inquisitive hearers who are reshaped by the next thing they hear. They are liable because they are children and not fully developed.

They are not fully developed in understanding of robust, sound doctrine and able to recognize and guard against false winds of doctrine. Now let's put this into context.

context. There is a difference between a child acting as a child and an adult acting as a child. There is a certain expectation that a child is going to be childish and as such, you would seek to use that as an opportunity to teach and to instruct them because children are children.

[19 : 37] And when we apply that to that of the faith or theological understanding, again, the context isn't that everybody has knowledge and then some decide to stray from it.

Rather, because of the fall, we are in a sin-cursed world. Because of sin, everybody has a sinfully deficient understanding of truth. And it is through the work of the Spirit in which we come to an understanding of a corrected or a repaired understanding of that truth.

So it's a process of growth which occurs, a process of maturity. So because of the fall, because of the corruption, children are expected to be children.

And then in verse 15, we see that on the other hand, growth is towards maturity. That is the likeness of Christ and communion with him as head.

Notice the distinction between the two. Children are deceived by lies, maturity speaks truth. Now, back to 14, on that of children, says, tossed to and fro, being tossed to and fro like a ship without ballast.

[20 : 59] They cannot stay the course when jostled by waves, winds, or storms. They stagger, they're swayed, they're seduced. Now, to waver is like a wave tossed to and fro, that is, not being firm in the faith, not resolved in sound doctrine, but moved about like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

Notice that these winds of doctrine don't just sway those with no doctrinal formulation, they agitate and ruin saints previously exposed to sound doctrine, but have been moved about by way of deception.

Now, the person who says just me and my Bible and does so to the exclusion of 2,000 years of Christ's victory gifts to the church.

Now, Biblicism, it might sound good because it does, after all, emphasize the Bible. However, what our text says here, says that the ascended Christ gave gifts to the church for a purpose, and that purpose is indicated.

Therefore, we should receive those gifts and use them. They are subordinate to the Bible, of course. We should use them as helps to our understanding of the Bible. And these gifts are God's

means of provision for the church and the dispensation of divine providence.

[22 : 32] So the person who claims to be a Christian but yet completely absences himself from church whatsoever, is excluding himself from Christ's gifts to the church.

So also the accumulation, so when last sermon when we consider it as a shotgun pattern on a target, should your aim be true, true being the bullseye, then there will be a concentrated pattern. So let's say today all of Christ's victory gifts to the church, those pastors and teachers, should their aim be true, there should be a concentrated pattern around that which is true or bullseye. And then day after day, year after year, century after century, you stack those targets with the axis being the bullseye and there will be as though on a timeline of history, a thick smear along that bullseye of Christ's victory gifts, pastors and teachers, contending for the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

Hear what Augustine said, it would not be right or becoming for any one man, whatever his experience, to aspire to correct the unanimous opinion of many venerable and learned men.

[23 : 57] So no longer children tossed to and fro, and it mentions the winds of false doctrine in verse 14, and it gives us three things to understand the winds of false doctrine or those who teach such false doctrines.

The first is the trickery of men, the second is cunning craftiness, and the third is deceitful plotting. The trickery of men, this is false and wicked.

It's trickery, trickery that is false and wicked, that is ulterior motives. The second is cunning craftiness, to act under pretense or to say one thing but mean another.

It is cunning, it is craftiness. And third is deceitful plotting, that is to seduce, to ambush, or to spread error and to drive into error. Deceitful plotting.

Now if you notice of these things, notice the words that's used, trickery, cunning, deceitful. an example would be the pastor who claims subscription to articles of the church.

[25 : 08] So this isn't speaking of members, it is the pastor or somebody who is, who a church is looking to call as their pastor, who claims subscription to the articles of that church, whatever those articles may be, whether robust or not.

And in his claiming subscription to the articles, keeps back mental reservations or alternative, alternate interpretations, and then subsequently teaches contrary to what the articles teach. Or claiming orthodoxy on paper and using orthodox terminology but explaining into it a different, unbiblical, and unorthodox meaning.

Trickery of men, cunning craftiness, deceitful plotting. Christopher Ash wrote that flattery means smooth or slippery.

For example, a smooth talker, telling people what they like to hear, a kind of smooth speaking in the people of God that sounds plausible and is enjoyable, even devotional, but is filleted of necessary hard truth, and all the deadlier for the pleasure it gives and the addiction it creates.

[26 : 28] Now, the purpose of Christ's victory gifts is provision for spiritual health and growth to unify his church. So that brings us to growth and maturity.

And notice what it says in 15. It talks about truth, growth, joined, held, and makes. growth and maturity, but, speaking the truth in love.

When we consider that those in the camp of doctrinal indifference will try to assert that being loving is being nice, and that doctrine divides and excludes, so, therefore, that's not nice and must be unloving.

However, nothing is more loving than the truth, and 1 Corinthians 13.6 tells us that love rejoices in the truth, that is, it rejoices in the prospering of truth.

So you cannot be truly loving unless it is in terms of being truthful. Being loving cannot exclude truth. The church must contend for the truth, and do so in a loving manner.

[27 : 47] This is not loving as defined by the world as being inclusive and feeling a pleasant reaction of affection. Rather, being loving is obeying God's commands.

It is upholding our duty to God and our duty to our fellow man as we contend for the truth. When we consider love, our understanding or our experience, our feeling of love as creatures, love, or if we seek to define love the way that the world defines it, it's inevitably going to be involved being moved from one state or to the other.

We call love an affection, affection, and we know that God is love, but when we consider love biblically, particularly God's love, although it is generally acceptable to refer to God's love as an

affection, it's not the best word.

The better word to describe it is a perfection, because an affection means to be affected, and to be affected means to move from being out of a state into that state, whereas God's love is a perfection, it is a completion, it is a fullness of love.

God's love and the expression of his love is not moved on an object which is lovable and affects God to then respond accordingly.

[29 : 09] Rather, God's love, as we see, this is love that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So it's not that we were lovable and God loving us, it's that we did not deserve God's love, we were unlovable, but because God is love, an expression of his love, God showed his love to us.

So also similarly, as it is reflected in the covenant of marriage, hence in the marriage vows, to sum it up, for better or for worse. It's a marriage vow, it's not to say, so long as you cause me pleasant emotions, will I continue to love you?

It is a commitment, it is a dedication, it is to love the spouse, whether they're being lovable or not. speaking the truth in love means even speaking the truth, even when the object of the word spoken does not move you to pleasant emotions, for example, while being persecuted or while being reviled.

Speaking the truth in love that we may grow up into Christ who is the head, that is to increase in spiritual good, being fruitful. Christ who is the head from whom all the body nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase that is from God.

Now, where it says that we may grow up into Christ who is the head, had we been reading from Ephesians 1 all the way to this, there would be much in our mind when we read about Christ in whom we are to grow up into who is the head.

[30 : 51] So, what about Christ? What particularly should come to mind when we see Christ in this text? Namely, in the context of the previous passage, Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

That being the Word who is eternal, who is eternally God, the same essence as the Father, who is the very substance of God, took to himself a body and assumed our nature, being born of the Virgin Mary in a low condition and undergoing the miseries of this life in a sin-cursed world, suffering and dying, dying cursed death on the cross, being buried.

more so, being raised from the dead, victorious over sin and death and Satan and hell, being raised, ascending on high and seated in heaven with all authority and all power, exceeding greatness of the almighty power of God on display on the resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Christ, this is the Christ in which it speaks of, and what is it telling us that it is accomplished in Christ's humiliation and exaltation? Of course, the context of Ephesians 1, Christ purchasing redemption.

redemption. So, Christ purchased redemption and we see an eternal perspective of what's going on, but yet what about from the individual person?

[32 : 36] What about from the perspective personally? In other words, how does a sinner be made right with God? How can I be right with God? How can I be in a right standing with God?

How can I be justified before a holy God? How can I be saved? How can this redemption, which the Father purposed and the Son accomplished and the Spirit applies, how can that be applied personally?

And that is that we are justified before a holy God by faith alone. And faith is the instrument of justification through which we receive Christ.

Christ, by receiving Christ and laying hold of Christ. So when we discuss these big truths about salvation and the work of God in eternity and how it affects dead, lost, condemned sinners, if you are still dead in your sins, if you have not yet received Christ, and you're wondering, how can I be right with the holy God?

God. And the answer is to receive Christ, to lay hold of Christ, to embrace Christ, to rest on Christ. And then in verse 16, it essentially sums it all up.

[34 : 00] the body's growth comes from Christ as the body does its work in love. Now this is the work of the whole body, although while verse 11 speaks specifically of the teaching ministry, the word-based teaching ministry of church leadership, there is the whole body involved.

So this is not one man preaching by himself to an empty sanctuary. That is not the whole body involved. This is not a full sanctuary with every member preaching.

Rather, this is each part of the body having its part, but each part is not all the same. So a question that each church should consider and ask themselves is, are the church leaders promoting this united growth?

And is the body following? Is the church fitly joined together in the right place and order? Or is it just jointed from disregarding the ascended Christ's victory gifts?

So what we've read in this passage, what if, two questions, first one is what if this passage is neglected? neglected? And the second is what happens when this growth occurs?

[35 : 31] So the first question, what if this passage is neglected? Now John Owen wrote a small manual called the duties of Christian fellowship. And there's a subtitle. The subtitle is quite long, but it's quite good.

I like it. The subtitle to this manual called Duties of Christian Fellowship. The subtitle is Brought to the Borders for the Encouragement of the Saints Traveling to the Land with Their Faces Toward Zion or Rules for Directing Believers How to Walk in Fellowship According to the Order of the Gospel.

And in this manual, he states, Believers are to attend regularly and to submit to the preaching of the word and administering of the ordinances committed to the pastor by virtue of his ministerial office. They are to do this with a willing obedience in the Lord. The failure to consider these principles is the cause of all the negligence, carelessness, laziness, and indiscipline while hearing the word, which has taken hold of so many these days.

Only a respect for the truth and authority of God in the preaching of his word will bring men to hear it soberly and profitably. It is also the case that men grow tired of hearing the word only after they have grown tired of putting it into practice.

[36 : 54] And then, what happens when this growth occurs? If you remember from Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 20 to 22, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

So Ephesians 4 verses 11 to 16, and he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men and the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, by speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Our great God, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for this passage we have before us. We thank you for your work of redemption, and in the triune God's work of redemption, in the Father purposing, the Son accomplishing, and the Spirit claiming.

Thank you, Lord, that those of us whom have been called as the elect and gathered together on this Lord's Day, we thank you, Lord, that we know you as a redeeming God.

While your creation declares that you exist, and declares that you are infinitely wise and powerful and righteous, and that there is consequences for disobedience, we thank you, Lord, that we are not left there, but that through your word, through the gospel, and the work of your spirit, effecting this in the hearts of the hearers, that lost, dead sinners are made alive, called out of darkness into marvelous light.

[39 : 25] We thank you that you apply the work of redemption to those who are in utter need of divine intervention. So, Lord, those whom you have called into your flock, we thank you and praise you for your work of redemption.

We thank you for Christ's humiliation, that is, by the incarnation, the word eternal God took on our nature in order to suffer and die, to pay the price which is our debt, which we owe in our place, and Christ's righteousness imputed into our account, that we are seen as righteous, that we are clothed in Christ's righteousness.

Thank you, Lord, that as such, we are in a right standing before a holy God. We thank you for the gifts of salvation, the graces of repentance and faith through which we receive Christ, we rest on Christ, we lay hold of Christ, we embrace Christ, Christ alone, by faith alone.

Lord, we have so much to be grateful for, and as we particularly consider the incarnation of Christ at this time of year, we ought to always have our thoughts go to the cross, where Christ was crucified, where Christ poured out his blood, where Christ poured out his life to save dead sinners. I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[40 : 59] Thank you.