The Gifts of Christ to His Church
Scripture: Ephesians 4:7-11
Code: 1925

1978

It's our great joy this morning to return to our study of the Book of Ephesians. So I would invite you to take your Bible there and look with us at the 4th Chapter of Ephesians. We're working our way through this wonderful book together. We find ourselves in the practical section, Chapters 4 and 5 and 6. I hope you remember all of the things we studied in the first six verses. We spent four or five weeks on them and such rich profound and foundational truth for our Christian living.

And now we come to Verses 7 through 11. I want to read them to you just to set them in your mind and then we'll get into really understanding them together. Ephesians, Chapter 4 beginning at Verse 7, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore it saith when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some teaching shepherds." And we'll stop right there.

At first reading I imagine your mind is a little bit puzzled. It's not an easy passage to understand. Particularly Verses 9 and 10 and even Verse 8 has left a gap that is filled only by some diligent study and some great help in the original languages and in trying to put together the pieces of Psalm 68 which is quoted here. But I really believe that God is a wonderful message for us in these verses and I want you to see it. I've entitled this little section the gifts of Christ for his church. The gifts of Christ for his church.

When this auditorium was completed, I remember I preached a sermon on what Christ does for his church. And it was really kind of a flipside of what we usually hear in church. And that is what we are to do for Christ. But you know as you study the New Testament it's about equally divided between those two things. There is a tremendous amount of exhortation in the New Testament. There is a tremendous amount of commanding. There are things that are incumbent upon us. There are binding statements that are laid at our feet and the only response that is Godly is one of obedience.

In other words, God repeatedly says do this. But the other side of it is that God says I have also done this. There is a volume of material in every New Testament book that tells us what Christ does for us.

In fact one of my favorite Chapters in all of the Bible is Romans Chapter 8. And I entitled it what Christ does for you whether you like it or not. In other words, you don't even have anything to do with it. It's just done. In fact the first three chapters of Ephesians would be under this category, wouldn't they? What Christ does for us or the first 11 chapters of Romans or the first four chapters of Galatians. Or the first two chapters or Colossians, etc., etc.

Christianity is not just what we do for God. Not at all. It is a response to what God in Christ has done for us. And basically people that gets back to the very core of the Gospel. Remember this and this is a review for you. But the core of the Gospel is bound up in one word and that word is grace, okay? That's the key word. Grace. And you will note that in Verse 7 that word appears "unto every one of us is given grace." First of all, now watch it, Christianity is defined not by what we do, but by what God has done.

Christianity's first definition is grace; obedience comes tucked along a little bit under that later. Christianity then is defined as God's grace. Now let me talk about that for just a minute. The Bible knows much more about giving then getting. Because it is God's nature to give. In fact our Lord Jesus said it is more blessed to what? Give than to receive. And that is the expression of how grace operates. God through the words of Peter, "Calls himself the God of grace." The Gospel is called the Gospel of grace. Paul says we are saved by grace.

Grace is the heart of the Gospel and grace is an expression of what God does. Now let me give you a little definition. Grace by definition is an act of giving. Okay? Grace by definition is an act of giving. There is no grace unless it acts in giving. That is basic to its definition. Grace is an act of giving. And you will see that in Verse 7. Look back at it. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the what "gift." You see it there? Gift. Grace gives.

It is its character to give. That's why we talk about gifts of grace. Gifts of grace, charismata, charisma. It is the character of grace to give. And by the way, it gives in a measure that is unmerited, unearned and undeserved and free because it is its character to give. Grace is not something that is dependent upon the receiver. It is dependent only on the giver. It is a self-motivated, self-generated undeserved, unmerited, unearned free act of giving.

And that is the core of the Gospel. Now let me stretch you a little bit by adding a second dimension to that. It is not only the act of giving, but watch this, it is the act of self-giving that best defines grace. Grace is self-donation. It is not so much giving what I have as it is giving myself that is real grace. Grace in its most magnanimous terminology is a self-donation of God to man. Now hang onto that thought because that is a tremendously strategic thought. When God gives, it is not the object that he gives that is significant; it is that he gives himself that is significant.

It is self-donation. And so we can say very simply then that grace is God giving himself to an undeserving sinner. Boy that's fantastic. It would be one level of kindness and one level of grace to give a sinner something, but to give a sinner himself is everything. You know I mean when you pick out a partner to marry, you're picky. You just don't give yourself to anybody. And that's a long, unless you got some kind of problem and you take anybody you can get. You know? But basically, you're trying to find somebody that you feel you want to give yourself to. And all your life you're told, boy, pick wisely.

And you say to God, “God you look down at me and all you saw was an ugly sinner, what in the world ever made you want to give yourself to me? To enter into an eternal relationship with me.” Well that's the act of grace. Grace is a self-donation. And you know as you study this in the New Testament, it becomes more and more clear all the time. For example, in John 3:16, the verse you first learned, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten what "son." Which is an act of self-giving because the father and the son are one. If you've seen me, you seen the father.

God gave himself that's the heart of the Gospel. And when Jesus came into the world, Jesus said the same thing. "I give you myself. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood I am the living water, if any man thirsts, drink of me. I am the living bread. If any man hungers, eat of me. I am the light of the world. I want to enter your heart and shed the light all over the darkness. I am the life of the world that wants to come in and replace the deadness. I am living that wants to replace death. I am the way that wants to replace your lostness. I am the truth that wants to replace your ignorance." All through the claims of Christ he's talking about his self-giving.

In fact when he met the woman at the well and first announced that he was the Messiah, the very first message he ever gave was a message of giving. He looked at that lady who was an evil woman who had had five husbands and was living in a state of adultery and he said to that lady, "lady, you know what I'd like to do, I'd like to give you some water and you'll never thirst again."

And you know who that water was? It was him, wasn't it? And later on in John 7, he said, "I am the living water." You see he's always self-donation with God. It's always self-giving with Christ. And believe me people that must be the pattern and the picture of Christianity if the world sees, if they're ever going to believe we got anything real. And I'm afraid today and a lot of circles of Christianity the world looks at us as people who want to get rather than people who want to give.

They'll never comprehend the God of grace if they see a whole lot of Christians who are trying to receive rather than give. The doctrine of God as Paul put it would never be adorned in us if we can't manifest the truth of his graciousness. So God is a God of grace who self-donates to us. Who puts in us his life. Who grants to us his kingdom, who gives to us his inheritance. Who gives us his riches and his kindness. And Christ is an alternating person also who gives himself to us.

Who gives his power to us. Who gives his spirit to us. And obviously the spirit is self-donating also. The Holy Spirit grants to us his own self what says Paul? We know you not that your body is the what? The temple of the spirit of God. And I think it can all be summed up in Ephesians 3:19 where it says that "if everything else is right," and we studied this, "if in fact we are strengthened by his spirit in the inner man, and Christ settles down and is at home in our lives," 3:19 says, "we will be filled with all the fullness of whom "God."

Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Beloved that's the heart of Christianity. I just want you to understand that. The heart of Christianity is a self-donating act of God to dwell within the sinner. To make him righteous. Tremendous thought. That's the core of Christianity. So get ready for it. If that is the act of God and salvation, he won't change. He will keep on giving. In fact in Ephesians we studied it, look back at Chapter 2 and Verse 7. It says that "in the ages to come." In other words, starting from the point of salvation going on throughout eternity in the ages to come he will show the exceeding riches of his grace in his continued kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

You see God self-donating act of grace only began at salvation, it extends throughout the end of eternity, by the way do you realize in the Book of Revelation it says that when you get to heaven, you are going to sit with Christ in his throne and he sits in the father's throne? You're going to be right there. You're going to have a room in the Father's house. God always gives what is his. God always gives himself.

So basic to this text then now note it, we must understand this reality about grace. It is a self-donating act. Now, If God gives, if Christ gives, if the spirit gives, then we are not surprised when we read in Verse 7 that unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. After all Paul made that wonderful statement in 2 Corinthians 8:9, that "he who is rich for your sakes became" what "poor. That ye through his poverty might be made rich." God's whole purpose was to empty himself to make us rich. And so it's not unusual to see God doing acts of giving. Now let's look and see what specifically it is in this text that God is giving us.

And keep it in mind beloved that as Christians, we are not on the giving end all the time. This is not some kind of a monastic structured lifestyle that is demanding conformity out of fear. We're on the receiving end of God's gracious gifts. And the response of obedience comes to God's unending, unlimited generosity. Let's see what he has to give. Verse 7 says, "To every one of us has given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Now the first thing we find in this text, I'm going to give you three points. The first thing is the gifts of Christ to the individual believer.

The gifts of Christ to the individual believer. Later on he will talk about the gifts of Christ to the total church. The gifts of Christ to the total church. And in the middle, there's a section about how Christ got the right to give these gifts. So the first category, the gifts of the individual, the last category, the

gifts to the total church and in the middle, Verses 8 to 10, how Christ gained the right to give these gifts. Let's begin by looking at Verse 7 and let's consider first of all the gifts that Christ gives to individual believers.

Just because you're Christian, you gain certain things at his hand. Unto every one of us there's no Christian that's left out. There is no such thing as a non-gifted believer. There is no Christian who got cheated unto every one of us and this is repeated also in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12. His given grace because it's always grace that we would get anything from God, right?

We have no deserving merit. According to the measure of the gift of Christ. Christ then now watch and I'll summarize the verse has granted to every Christian based on his free exercise of grace a certain gift. Notice the word measure, it is the Greek word “metron” from which we get metric or meter. It has to do with quantity. In other words, each one of us has a measured out gift, a certain quantity, a certain definition with certain limitations, parameters and capabilities. You'll notice that it is in the singular; every one of us is given a certain gift.

Peter also uses the singular as each man has received the gift. Now I feel that we have to be fair with the Greek text and since singulars are dealt with, we've got to see our gifts as a singular gift. Now there's always a big argument among Bible teachers about whether a Christian can have more than one gift. Well, let me answer this way, no. A Christian can only have one gift. The gift 1 Peter 4. "The gift" Ephesians 4:7 "that one gift." But let me tell you something interesting. There are many areas of giftedness. Now let's go back and I'll show you something. First we'll look at Romans Chapter 12. And then we'll go to 1 Corinthians 12 and I'll show you what I'm trying to point out.

In Romans 12 we have the New Testament introduction at least chronologically if not in time as you read through the New Testament, this is the first introduction of the concept of gifts. And it's based upon a picture of a human body as it is in 1 Corinthians 12. "For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ and everyone members one of another." In other words, Paul says, now I want to give you a little picture here. Look at a human body and a human body has many members, all of which have varying function. It's one body but it's multiplicities of function. That's the way it is in the church he says, Verse 6. Watch.

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us. In other words as the body is one and yet has different gifts, so we have different gifts according to grace, again which has given us. And the emphasis of the Holy Spirit on the gift is always that they're graciously given. You don't earn them; you gain them at the hand of a gracious God. God gives them out.

In other words, God created your body. You didn't when you want to have a baby, as a married couple, you don't say Lord, we'd like one with blue eyes. We'll put in our order, 6'3, whatever, blonde

hair, blah, blah, 175 IQ, so he can make a big living for us and we can retire at 40, etc., etc. You don't do that. You just take what God makes. Well friends, that's the way it is in the church. And I think there are a lot of people today who missed the point. They're ordering their gifts. But God doesn't work on that basis. God who designed the body also designed the church.

And God knows who needs what in what combination to function in the world today. His church will function in accord with his sovereignty just as creation humanly does as well. So God sets the gifts differing according to his own sovereign grace. He goes on to say there's prophecy for example. And there is the gift of ministry or “deoconia,” the gift of service, of teaching, exhortation, giving, of showing mercy, ruling and he begins then to show us what I call categories of giftedness. Categories of giftedness. Okay?

If you go to 1 Corinthians 12 for just a moment, you'll see the same thing and then I'll draw a conclusion. 1 Corinthians 12:4 says, "There are diversities of gift of the same spirit." And remember Verse 11 says, "that it is the spirit who divides to every man several yes he will." You don't put in an order; it's the spirit's work. He's designing the body. There are diversities of gifts, differences of administrations, but it's the same Lord, it's the same Spirit, there are diversities of operations but it's the same God.

But the manifestation of the spirit, that gift is given to every man. Again it's everybody. The same as Ephesians 4:7, "every one of us, everyone." And he goes on to name some. The word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, faith, and so forth and he mixes in some of the supernatural gifts that we use to confirm the apostolic era. But the point is this. Everybody's received from Christ enablement’s for functioning in the body.

Now I want you to get this. Each of us has a gift. The gift, specific gift. But I believe after the study of these gifts that I've done through the last 10 or 12 years that these in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12 are not absolute definitions. In other words, we don't say, well he has the gift of teaching, he has the gift of teaching, she has the gift of teaching and put them all in a little box or make them all the same, like a whole bunch of rubber ducks all quacking alike.

I don't think that's the point. I don't think there's any way that you can say that everybody with the same gift does the same thing in the same way. What I believe you see here in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, now here's the key are categories of giftedness. Or areas of giftedness. Within the category of the teaching gift, there are multiplicities of ways that can function. And watch this. I believe that your gift singular may incorporate as many as five or six different categories of giftedness. Some people will say, well you can only have one gift because it says the gift or it says a gift.

Well, let me ask you this, if I'm a pastor and the Lord requires me to teach and the Lord requires me to rule the church as it says in 1 Timothy, how could I possibly teach without the gift of teaching, how could I possibly rule the church without the gift of ruling. So right there I got to have at least two. And that I have a singular gift which is the combination of those areas. And I believe this is where the spirit of God makes the beauty of the church; the combinations are limitless, so that everybody's individual gift is distinct.

Now listen. If everybody who had a gift had a gift that was the same as everybody else, then a whole lot of us wouldn't be necessary. Somebody could fade away and we could stick somebody else in, right? But I believe that God is a God of distinction. Listen, do you know that we can tell you by your voice, your voice could be tracked on a machine and there's no voice that makes the same little jiggles as yours? That's how individual you are.

Do you know that your fingerprints obviously are like no other fingerprints of anybody in the world? Your, there's no such thing as an identical twin. God always makes a distinction. In other words, God is in the business of making differences. And you can't convince me that when it comes to the church he just stamps out a whole bunch of carbon copies.

I believe that every Christian is what I like to call a spiritual snowflake. Listen; if God could do it with snowflakes, I think he did it with us. No two of us is ever alike. The combination of giftedness areas that the Lord blends together to make you what you are and the way he administrates that and the way he orders that and the way he places that in the body makes you absolutely necessary vital and strategic. The body of Christ could never function without you in the way that it was meant to function.

And therein beloved lies the real issue in Christianity as we look at it today. We got a lot of Christians who see Christianity as a spectator sport. They want to watch it happen. They just never get involved, listen. We desperately need you because you are a spiritual snowflake and there's nobody in the world like you. And if you don't do what God has enabled and gifted you to do then nobody's going to do it.

And by the way let me remind you of this. That giftedness, that enablement that God's given you is a gift from Jesus Christ. I mean that ought to lay a little bit of pressure on you to do something with it. I remember when we got married; we got a lot of gifts. And I always felt bad about the ones that sat in the garage for five years that we never used. You know? You feel bad about that. But in many cases they were non-usable to us.

They just didn't fit into our life, but listen. When our dear Lord Jesus Christ gave you a gift, when he, by his wonderful grace and sovereignty gave you a gift, and blended together certain areas of enablement under the power of the Holy Spirit, it was not only an act of love to you that he would give you such a gift, it was not only a way of him saying I love you so much I see you as unique. I see you

as different. I see you like I see nobody else in this whole wide world. And this is just yours and this is just for you.

But he was also saying and everybody in the church is going to need it so much would you pass it on to them? Would you use it for their benefit? And I guess maybe it would be a serious affront to the kindness and grace and generosity of Jesus Christ not to use the gift he gave me. And it would also be the loss of all those around me who so need what I have to offer. Listen, I'm not interested in just coming on Sunday morning and talking to a bunch of people, have them all walk away. I'm only interested in coming here to nourish a bunch of people who are already committed to minister to each other.

I'm not interested in spectators. I don't want people to just see the back of everybody's head. I want people in the room to turn around and say hey, this is what I'd like to do for you. This is what I believe I can do. You know this morning, Greg Barshaw was getting ready for the pre-marital class and he said, I just had a wonderful time. I just came from our handicap house right across the parking lot on the other end of the campus is a handicap house. And he says I think it's going to be exciting John in three weeks I think we've got three Christians to baptize that have come to Christ since we began our handicap ministry.

I thought to myself, there's a guy with a gift and he's using the gift that's making a difference in the body of Christ. And you know something, you say, well I can't do that. Well, you're giving a gift every one of us is giving. I don't want to belabor the point, I just want you to know that you didn't deserve it; you didn't earn it. But a gracious Christ has given it to you.

That's the gift. And it's yours and yours alone and we can't do without it. There's nobody to replace you. If you don't function, we lose it. You're that unique. Now let me show you the second thing. After presenting this area of individual giftedness in Verse 7, Paul wants to go on and talk about the gifts given to the whole body. The general gifts that are given to the whole church. But before Paul gets into that, he stops and he does a little Scripture exposition on Psalm 68:18. And here he shows why Christ had the right to give these gifts.

Look at Verse 8. And he's quoting Psalm 68:18. "Wherefore it seth" that is Psalm 68:18 said. "When he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." Now we'll stop there. If you were to study Psalm 68, you would see it as a picture of God like a conquering hero. God sets out in Verse 1 to make a war with his enemies and God wins by the way in case you want to know how it ended. God always wins.

So God goes out to war and God is victorious. Now when God is victorious, he comes back and it shows God as it were in Verse 18 ascending the hill of victory. And he's got all of the spoils and all of the captives with him. That's the picture. And by the way, Paul use of it here indicates to us that it is a

prophecy of Jesus Christ. It was a picture of the great victory of Jesus over Satan sin, death and hell.

That's what the Psalmist was really looking forward to. Now let's see how Paul interprets this tremendous Verse. "When he ascended up on high he let captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." Now here's the picture. When a king of Israel would go to battle, he'd go out to fight the enemy and if he would win, he would come back and when he came to the city, he would ascend the hills of Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion the great crowning hill of Jerusalem. The place of great victory. The place where God had established his people. And so the king would ride in up ascending as it were Mt. Zion.

And they would all be as they were with Jesus, hailing him as king in the day of Palm Sunday as we remember it was just a traditional way to accept the conquering hero. He would be riding in not on the colt the foul of an ass, but on the steed that he was victorious in. And he would ride to the city and behind him he would have two things. Two things. He would have the spoils of victory which would no doubt be a lot of the people from that foreign nation brought to be slaves. And some riches. And some things that they had taken as spoiled.

But there would be a second group. Notice it says, "he who would lead captivity captive." He would recapture the captives. What does he mean? Many times other nations had Israelites in prison. Many times when the kings of Israel conquered that nation, they freed those captives and brought them back to their own land you see. So you've got him with the people from that nation who are being brought back and you've got him with his own people who were free.

So the picture then I'll get it because you'll never understand the text without it. Here comes the conquering hero. He has won the war, he is victorious, the victory is done and he's got the spoils on the one hands, people from that nation brought back to serve Israel and he's got his own people who were held prisoner there that he has released and set free. And they're coming back free and it's a joyous scene.

That is precisely what Paul sees here in terms of Christ. Now watch. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he entered into a battle with Satan and his demons and his hosts. And he won that battle. That's right. It looked like a loser on the cross, Christ was a winner. And after the cross, Jesus came back up as it were ascending the mount of victory and he had behind him the spoils of war and he led captivity captive.

Now let me go from there and let's follow Paul's exposition in Verses 9 to 10 and we'll clarify it. Now he came back with captives and he came back with spoils to give. Now he wants to explain who this is. Who is Psalmist talking about? Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth. In other words, before whoever this refers to ascended, he descended. Verse 10. "He that descended is the same that ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things." That he might fill all things.

Who is he that fills all things? Go back to Chapter 1, Verse 23. "Which is his body the fullness of him that filleth all in all. Who is it the antecedent" Verse 20 "which he brought in" what "Christ." Christ is the one who fills all in all. Christ is the one who dominates the universe. Alright, that's who he's talking about.

Christ is also and you'll notice in Verse 8 it says he ascended, in Verse 9 it says he ascended and in Verse 10 it says he ascended. Now the only person I know of the New Testament that ascended is who? Jesus Christ. Acts Chapter 1, "he ascended. A crowd received him out of their sight." Now then Paul takes this scripture and applies it to Christ. And he says Christ is the one who ascended the hill of victory. Christ is the one who brought the spoils and led the captives free.

And you say, but what does this have to do with the gifts? Now watch and I'll show you. Look with me at 1 Peter Chapter 3. And if you're a little bit lost, that's alright. We're getting there. You'll begin to see the outline of what the conclusion is as we look at this. Now watch. This, I'm going to show you the exact incident that is prophesied in that Psalm. The exact thing that Paul is making application too.

Verse 18 of Chapter 3. Now let's just find out where we are. We're talking about Christ for Christ. That's also hath once suffered for sins "the just for the injustice that he might bring us to God being put to death." Now stop there. Alright, now we know who we're talking about Christ, we now where we're talking, he's put to death. We're at the cross, okay.

This is a picture of the cross. Now watch. At the cross, while he was suffering for sin, while he was the just for the unjust, while he was put to death he was dead in the flesh but he was alive in the what? Spirits, small “s.” Small “s.” In other words, his outer man had died, but his inner man was alive. Now if you ever asked a question where was Christ for those three days? We know where his body was, it was on the cross for a while, then it was in the grave. Where was he? You ever wonder about that?

Well I'll tell you where he was. He was descending. He was descending. You say how do you know that? Verse 19. His spirit by which and by which modifies spirit, he went and preached unto the spirits in prison. He descended down to the prison of spirits. You say what's that? Alright, now watch. I'll give you a little picture. In the Old Testament time, the place of the dead, we can just draw a circle in your mind; the place of the dead was known as Hades or Sheol. Okay? It's not really hell is not the proper word, that's strictly a New Testament concept.

But Hades. Now Hades had two compartments or two parts. Draw a line across the middle of the circle. The upper part was the part where the righteous dead were their spirits, the lower part, the unrighteous and the bound demons. Okay? So there's this place called Hades or the grave sometimes it's called or Sheol. It's not really defined in the Old Testament any more than that.

And this is where dead people's spirits go. The righteous to the upper half which is good. It's bliss, it's happiness, and it's the righteous people, the people who believe God. The bottom category, the unrighteous, the evil. And also in that category were bound demons. Now there are really two kinds of demons. There are the loose ones and the bound ones, right? The loose ones are running around doing their thing. The bound ones are in that pit.

You know how they got there? They're the ones in Genesis 6 who came down and cohabitated with the daughters of men and produced giants in the earth. They did such, it was a whole bunch of rosemary babies is what it was. A whole generation of them. And that's why God destroyed the world by water to flood out that terrible conglomerate demon man race that would have messed up the whole concept of the God man Christ's redemption. And so he flooded them and destroyed that whole civilization.

He took those demons that did that and he put them in everlasting chains says Peter, "in everlasting chains." He says that in 2 Peter. And Jude says it also. "And he kept them there." So in that lower part of Sheol, that it's even called “Tartarus,” the pit, the place of the dead ungodly, the place of the demons, not the final hell yet. But it's a place of torment, a place of unrighteousness, a place of evil.

Christ descended then into that place Verse 19 "in the prison he went. And to the spirits who by the way are fallen angels." It even tells you in Verse 22 "Angels, authorities, powers being made subject to him." And there it tells us clearly that they were angels. And what did he do there? It says he preached, but it is not the word you “ungolidzo.” It is not the word to preach the Gospel; it is Caruso, which is the typical Greek word to make a proclamation. He went there and he proclaimed something.

I could tell you what he proclaimed. He went down there and proclaimed that what looked like defeat was victory. And that is clear from Colossians where Paul talks about the same thing. In Chapter 2 in Verse 15. He says when Christ was on the cross; he spoiled the principalities and powers. Those are the fallen angels, the demons in the pit. He made a show of them openly triumphing over them. In other words, while his body was in the grave, his spirit descended into the lower part of Hades and there he made a proclamation of triumph in spite of what it looked like he was the victor. He had triumph. He says in Colossians 2:15, "he made a show of them openly right before them so that they could see that he had triumphed. On his way out of the bottom part he went through the top part of the righteous people." And that's where we come to our text Ephesians. It says, "He led captivity captive." You know who the captives were? You know who were kept in that place called Sheol even though they were righteous, all the Old Testament what? Saints.

And they could never be resurrected. They could never be taken to glory until Christ had purchased their redemption on the cross. They had to wait for the triumph of Calvary. They had to wait for the victory that he would win that day. But when he won that victory, and he died for them and their sins

were washed away and as Hebrews says, "he perfected forever by one offering them that are sanctified." When he did it, then after his announcement he just opened the doors of the upper part of Hades and he released the captives. And it was at that point beloved that the spirits of the Old Testament Saints left whatever place that is and I can't define it any more than that.

And they ascended to be with God in his place. He led captivity captive. You see the beauty of the picture? And so here comes the conquering hero Jesus Christ. He's got the demons, his enemies bound on the one side, they are bound on the one side and on the other side, he's got the people of his own that he has set free in his conquering and he releases them to the liberty and the freedom of the sons of God.

That's what it means. Now beloved, listen. It was Jesus Christ act on the cross that allowed him to be the one who could give us the gift he gave us. And what I'm saying is this. You cannot treat the spiritual gift that you have lightly when you contemplate what price it cost for Christ to grant you that privilege. You see it was by his victory there that he gained the right to rule his own church. To be the one who fills all in all from the bottom of Sheol to the top of heaven. He fills it all and the right he gained at the cross and it was there when he gained that right at the cross that he had the right to also give you the gift.

Listen it isn't just that you can accept salvation at his hand because he died for it. You can accept that spiritual enablement to serve him at his hand because he died to gain the right to give you that. That's how important it is to him. Jesus Christ died on the cross for you to save you. Secondly he died on the cross to enable you to serve him. And he gives you a gift of love that was purchased at the same price that your redemption was purchased at for it's a corollary.

Having done that Paul closes with a final word. He says I want you to know that he not only gave gifts to individual Christians, but he gave gifts to the total body. And I love this. Oh, this is so good. When Christ went to the cross, he captured a whole bunch of people didn't he? And he delivered them out of Satan's domain. All the Old Testament saints? Well, all of us who would believe too, right? He won us that day even though we weren't saved yet. He won us on that day.

And I want you to look back at Verse 8, now watch this. At the end of Verse 8 "he gave gifts to men." Like any good conqueror, when he conquered the nation, he passed out the spoils. Christ did the same and what were these gifts? Not the same as Verse 7. He gave gifts unto men. Now skip the parenthesis in Verses 9 and 10 which is Pauls exegesis Jesus there, skip that, "he gave gifts unto men." What were they? Verse 11. Here they come. And he gave here are the gifts he gave. "Some prophets, or some apostles rather. Some prophets, some evangelists and some teaching shepherds." Stop right there.

Beloved Christ has given the individual believer the gift, the divine enablement so you can function in the church. And he's given to the total body what I call gifted men. Some apostles, are you indebted to the apostles? You better believe it. You know something; you wouldn't have a New Testament without them. They're the ones that wrote the New Testament.

When the early church met in Acts 2:42 it says that "they studied the apostles" what "doctrine." We're indebted to the apostles. And some prophets, oh the New Testament prophets. Those men of God who spoke for God the word of God who were so strategic in the founding and the crystallization of the incident church were so indebted to them and even though the apostles and the prophets have faded away and they passed off the scene as Ephesians 2:20 tells us. "They were for the foundation of the church. And there are no apostles and prophets today, we are indebted to them, they gave us the treasure of the word of God, they founded for us the basis of the church. And in the continuing legacy of God, giving us gifted men, it says, "he's given us evangelists and teaching Shepards."

You know something? It's hard to realize, it's I guess in my own life, but I see myself as I look at this text. As a trophy that Christ wanted to cross and chooses to give back to his church to be a teaching shepherd. We have other people in our church staff that are trophies one at the cross that God gives back to his church's evangelists. We have other teaching shepherds. People this is the legacy of Jesus Christ to his church.

And what Paul is saying in all of Chapter 4, 5 and 6 of Ephesians is this. "You got to live to the life and I told you what the life is." In 1 to 3. Now in 4 to 6, "you got to live it." And in order to live it, Number 1 "you start out with humility" right? The first 6 Verses. We saw that, didn't we? Humility. And secondly he says here, "in order to live it, you got to realize where the resources are. They're in your spiritual gift and they're in the gifted men God has given his church."

I don't know about you but I'm really indebted to God's gifted men. Gifted men throughout the years who have been evangelists and teaching shepherds, some of whom have preached and my heart has been blessed. Some of whom have taught me such as my own father. Others that I've read their books and studied their writings and listened to their tapes and gifted men that have affected the church.

Listen, these are gifts from Jesus Christ to is church. No wonder it tells us in 1 Timothy that we're to give double honor to such men. No wonder it tells us in Thessalonians that we are to give them due respect. No wonder it tells us in Hebrews 13 that we're to follow them; we're to pattern our lives after them. We're to accept them and to live behind them as it were in almost a mimicry. Because they are the gifts of Christ to his church.

It's a great responsibility for you to follow those men. It's a great responsibility for those men to fulfill their accountability to God. But listen. Christ has given us wonderful gifts. I don't know what else you

can say about a text like this. The apostle Paul is saying, hey, you want to walk the worthy walk. It's a walk of humility. It's a walk of unity. And it's a walk where you recognize the resources are in your own spiritual gifts. And the ministries of gifted men.

Are you submitting the gifted men? Are you coming onto the leadership of Godly evangelists and teaching shepherds? Have you submitted yourself to them and of course to us, boy it speaks volumes. Are you being faithful to be the kind of the Godly man that somebody could submit to? Listen. Don't view Christianity as something you do for God. It's really something he's done for you. And all he says to you is this. Look, I set the pace; I gave myself to you.

You know he's even given himself to us in the gifts we have? Do you know something? Do you know that every spiritual gift category is perfectly illustrated in Christ? If ever there was a preacher, it was Christ. If ever there was a teacher, it was Christ. If ever there was a ruler, it's Christ. If ever there was an administrator, it's Christ. If ever there was a servant, it's Christ. If ever there was a helper it's Christ. If ever there was a giver, it's Christ. If ever there was a man of faith it's Christ. Christ is the perfect illustration of every spiritual gift.

Now listen, so that when Christ gives you a spiritual gift, he is giving you himself. It is another self-donation. And that's why Peter says, when you speak, speak the oracles of God. When you serve, do it as unto God. Why? Because it is God's gift to you that operates only in his own energy. It is a self-donation. And when God gives to the church gifted men like those of us who lead you and other pastors and evangelists around the world, when God gives these gifted men to the church, the only way they can ever function properly is to function in the divine energy and resource that God alone supplies. Again it's a self-donation. It's a self-giving of God.

And when I stop to think beloved of all Jesus Christ has given me, that he has enabled me to serve him in this manner. And that he has equipped all of us in such a wonderful way. And given us these gracious gifts, then my responsible obedience to him is not something legalistic, it's something that springs out of a heart filled with loving gratitude.

I trust that's your heart too. Let's pray. What can we say Father to express thanks; words beg the issue. We go back to the fact of you want us to live the life. Saying thanks and not living thanks, makes words ashes. Lord help us to really be grateful. You've given us so much. Especially here at Grace. It seems like Lord, I don't understand it. I never have understood it. Why all these gifted people here? Why so many wonderful people? Why so many gifted men, evangelists and teaching shepherds to give to this one flock.

Oh Lord I so many times ponder in my mind to whom much has given much as required I would desire to be faithful. And I will desire that this people be faithful. You've been so gracious. You've given us yourself. You've given us something of yourself in every Christian here. Some special gift

that only you can empower. Something of yourself in every leader here. And Lord we know it's your grace, we didn't earn it, we didn't deserve it. I'm surprised day after day you don't take it away because of our unworthiness.

Lord help us to be thankful enough to use our gifts to pray for each other, to minister to each other and to be ministered unto. And may we walk the worthy walk. The walk of humility, the walk of unity based on diversity. We're one because we're each different, ministering to that very need that only we could supply. Make us your body in truth as we are in theology. And we'll give you the thanks in Jesus' name, Amen.

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