

## Ephesians Chapter 4

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For those of you that know me personally, you'd know I love to ask people, what is your spiritual gift? The way I like to learn about people is to ask them what they love to do and have a gift to do. It is my way of learning about someone! I assume most of us know if one's a Christian, then we have a special gift for the purpose of helping the church. It can be the ability to sing well, teaching or helping in some fashion. Again such gifts are designed to benefit the church. I believe I've got a gift to write about Him. My proof is lots of people read what I write! I don't care about financial rewards for this! I simply can't stand not doing it and I'm positive God called me to do this. I'm going off on this, so to speak, because that's the key point of this chapter.

In effect Chapters 1-3 explain why God created the church and what's the benefit to be in the church as well as explaining our eternal rewards for being a part of the Christian church. That of course, leads to my favorite question, "now what"? Of course, I don't believe Christians can earn their salvation in any way, shape or form! We are strictly saved by grace. So if we can't add to what God did for us, again it leads to my "now what" question. The first three chapters explains why the Christian church exists and how special that is. The rest of this book focuses on what is our role in the church! In short God wants us to use His power to live as He desires to be a good witness for Him! Yes, obedience matters, but our motivation for that obedience should be gratitude! We should be always grateful for our salvation. God want us to live as Jesus demands (show love to each other) never to prove our worth to Him, but to use the gifts He gave us to draw others to Him and encourage believers to be faithful to what He calls each of us to do as we all live as a witness for Him!

That leads me back to the topic of spiritual gifts. The first question we should have as believers is now that we're saved, what does God want me to do now? That's where the Holy Spirit helps us. The text in this chapters says that Jesus gives us gifts that we use to help other believers, and help those He calls to be believers, "but don't realize it yet!" When it comes to the gifts, I love to ask, what do you love to do if time was irrelevant? If your gift can be channeled to help the church in some way or fashion, that's a God-given gift used to benefit the church! I assume most of us know that. With that out of my system, there's a lot we can learn from Paul's writing here in Ephesians on what God expects of us as believers, so let me get rolling!

The chapter opens (again no chapter numbers in the original text) with Paul stating something that he'd already stated a few chapters back, that he's a prisoner of God. It is the idea that Paul knew God called him to be a witness for Him to people (just as He's called us to be a witness to others)! Therefore, he is explaining a few things about what it means to be called by God. It requires humbleness, patience with people as well as showing love to others. Realize a key factor is about trusting in His power working in us to make the kind of difference He desires. I should state one of my favorite expressions about using our spiritual gifts, "Nobody will claim they got the spiritual gift to take the trash out but it must go out" meaning it's not just using the gifts we have but also doing what needs to be done! Anyway, Paul states some of the fundamental beliefs such as the trinity, one Lord, one church, one baptism which shows to people witnessing it that we believe Jesus is God and wish to be used by Him like all believers.

Verse 8's a quote of Psalm 68:18 which Paul uses to state that when Jesus rose from the dead, He gave gifts to people (the verse implies men and women) to benefit the church in some fashion. Then Paul is telling us that God (Jesus) ascended into heaven after being in the lower regions of earth. It is simply a reference to the fact God was on the earth before ascending. So why does God give us gifts? Because

God chooses to work through people to bring new believers into the kingdom! God doesn't say, "You're saved, go kill yourself now!" He saves us for a purpose, which is to be a witness for Him in the world around us!

Then Verse 11 gives a few examples of gifts. The fact that some were called to be apostles, some to be prophets (people who have the gift of explaining God's plan for the world) evangelists (people who do have special gifts to lead others to Jesus), which doesn't excuse the rest of us from preaching Him. The last thing Paul lists is teachers which includes pastors. It does not mean that's an exclusive list. I know of people who have great gifts for administration, others to give in generous amounts and there are lots of other ways we can barely comprehend. Of course, all of us are called to help. Some Christians have special gifts for specific things, which is again why I love to ask people, "What is it you can't stand not to do?" This leads to the key purpose of the church to "build it up", to encourage and help believers so we can grow closer to Him. Think of it as the "maturity process" at work between the time we first did accept Jesus to the point we go to heaven.

With that said, Verses 14-16 give both negative examples to avoid as well as positive examples we can use to live as God wants us to live. No I'm not saying we can be perfect. I'm saying by God's power it is possible to use our lives and in particular our gifts to help build up the church. In other words, it is a lot more than being saved, it's about giving our lives purpose and meaning! Ask yourself, what greater purpose can there possibly be in life than to be used by the God who created us? I should also state the obvious here, if you're not sure what your gifts are, pray about it and even ask others what is it that you are good at, and consider how that gift can benefit the church!

Verses 17 to the end of the chapter focus more on how we are to live as Christians. We get positive as well as negative things. In other words, "Act like this, as non-believers act like that"! Again, it's never about trying to work through our ability, but letting God work through us and using gifts He gave us to make the type of difference God desires we make! Verses 17 to 19 focus on non-believer behavior. It even states that nonbelievers can grow to a point where they no longer care, but "flaunt" their nonbelief by their behavior. Of course, I believe anyone can be saved. I am just saying we can judge behavior as it becomes obvious by one's behavior if one is a believer or not! Negative examples include greed and sensuality (think sexual behavior outside of marriage) and "every kind of impurity". It's not hard for us to imagine what that includes.

Enough of the negative. Paul encourages us to think about Jesus and changing our behavior in effect to be the kind of witness God wants us to be! By Verse 25 Paul encourages us to speak the truth to those around us. It doesn't mean we have to preach Jesus "24/7". It just means to have the boldness to stand up for our beliefs when the subject is "on the line". Paul spends a few verses about the danger of anger and what that does to us as opposed to forgiveness. Don't get me wrong. Crime should be punished. I am talking about forgiving so it's no longer an obsession in our minds over ways we've been hurt! Paul talks about the importance of working so we can share with those in need! Here's the tough one: Don't let "bad talk" come out of our mouths! Yes. that's tough when we're driving! The point is we're always on the clock for Jesus whether we realize it or not! Having an attitude of forgiveness is a lot healthier, as well as a better witness for Jesus than to hold onto resentment and trying to get revenge! Sometimes I think there's no greater weapon in Satan's hand when we're obsessed with revenge versus forgiveness in our hearts.

Bottom line the last half of this chapter has some "hard stuff" for believers to deal with! The first part's what I call the "fun stuff" about learning about spiritual gifts and helping each other use their gifts as a benefit to other believers and potential believers. As for living as Jesus wants, obviously it requires us

to pray and depend upon His guidance to live as He desires. We must remember is God never asks us to do something He doesn't already equip us to do in the first place!