

Divine Gifts

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Introduction

In this lesson, we focus upon God's grace and gifts, as discussed in Ephesians 4:7-13. The chapter begins with Paul's exhortation, "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Disciples should diligently "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." To achieve this goal, we should manifest a proper attitude toward one another (vs. 1-3), and faithfully adhere to the Biblical pattern (vs. 4-6). Furthermore, believers must appropriate God's grace and gifts: those who walk in a worthy manner are redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus, and are guided by the offices of revelation, oversight and instruction.

The Redemptive Work of Christ Jesus

The grace of God is seen in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:7-10). "He descended" points to his death and burial; "He ascended" refers to His resurrection and ascension. Through His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, the Lord led captivity captive, gave gifts unto men, and now fills all things. This is the essence of the gospel, the good news of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Through obedience to the gospel we find forgiveness of sins and enjoy the hope of heaven (Rom. 6:3-4; Heb. 5:8-10).

He Died

Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29-34). Christ suffered for us, leaving an example that we should follow in His steps. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds we are healed (1 Pet. 2:21-25).

He Arose

After being buried in a rich man's tomb, Jesus Christ arose the third day, according to the Scriptures. This was the ultimate demonstration of His power and authority (John 2:18-22). He presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to the disciples over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). Afterwards, Jesus ascended to the Father, where He now sits at the right hand of glory (Acts 2:22-36).

He Gave Gifts

Through His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, Christ gave gifts unto men. Generally, these gifts include the forgiveness of sins, hope of heaven, and a shared relationship with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and fellow Christians (2 Cor. 9:15; Eph. 3:7). Contextually, these gifts involve divinely appointed offices in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Offices of Revelation, Oversight & Instruction

The grace of God is seen in the offices of revelation, oversight and instruction that God placed within the church (Eph. 4:11-13).

Apostles

He gave some as apostles. The Greek word *apostolos* refers to “a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle” [Thomas 652]. BDAG defines it as “God’s messenger, envoy.”

Function

Apostles served as divinely appointed agents of revelation (Eph. 3:1-5; Gal. 1:11-12).

Authenticity

In contrast with frauds and pretenders (2 Cor. 11:12-15; Rev. 2:2-3), the New Testament speaks of those who were true apostles (2 Cor. 12:11-13). They offered eye-witness testimony of what they had seen and heard (Acts 1:15-26; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Call

Those who served as apostles were called directly by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 4:18-22; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 15:7-8; Gal. 1:1-2, 11-12).

Prophets

He gave some as prophets. The Greek word *prophētēs* identifies “a prophet (an interpreter or forth-teller of the divine will)” [Thomas 4396]. BDAG define it as “a person inspired to proclaim or reveal divine will or purpose, prophet.”

Function

Prophets also served as divinely chosen agents of revelation (2 Sam. 24:11-14; Hag. 1:1-6).

Authenticity

The authenticity of a prophet came from their divine call and their faithful adherence to heaven’s message (Exod. 4:13-17). True prophets spoke by divine direction, and their message was consistent with others who served in the same capacity. In contrast, false prophets follow their

own spirit, speak from their own inspiration, but in reality they have seen nothing (Ezek. 13:1-7). Furthermore, their teaching contradicts divinely revealed truth (1 Kings 13:11-19; 1 John 4:1-6).

Call

Biblical prophets were called directly by God (Deut. 18:15-19; Jer. 7:25-26).

Evangelists

He gave some as evangelists. The Greek word *euaggelistēs* refers to “an evangelist, a bringer of good news” [Thomas 2099]. BDAG define it as a “proclaimer of the gospel, evangelist.”

Function

Evangelists serve as agents of proclamation. Their duty is to “preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim. 4:1-2; Col. 4:2-4).

Authenticity

Their authenticity comes from their fidelity to the Word of God (Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:3-5).

Call

The call of an evangelist/teacher comes from within rather than without. Such individuals are subject to a direct divine summons, but act out of conviction and a sense of duty (Acts 8:1-4; 1 Thess. 1:6-10).

Pastors

He gave some as pastors. The Greek word *poimēn* is used of “a shepherd” [Thomas 4166]. BDAG define it as “(1) one who herds sheep, shepherd, sheep-herder; (2) one who serves as guardian or leader, shepherd, fig. ext. of 1.”

Function

Pastors serve as agents of oversight in a local congregation. As Paul and Barnabas revisited the churches they had previously established, “they had appointed elders for them in every church” (Acts 14:23). Speaking to the Ephesian elders, the inspired apostle said, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:17, 28-32). Peter offered similar exhortations to elders of local churches (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Authenticity

The authenticity of an elder/bishop/pastor involves their qualifications, which are discussed below, and commitment to serving the flock (Jer. 3:15-16; 23:1-4).

Call

Elders must meet the qualifications set forth in the New Testament (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This call also involves a desire to serve: “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do.”

Teachers

He gave some as teachers. The Greek word *didaskalos* suggests “an instructor” [Thomas 1320] or “teacher” [BDAG].

Function

Teachers serve as agents of instruction, guiding their audience in the word and ways of God (1 Tim. 2:3-8).

Authenticity

Like evangelists, their authenticity is reflected in their adherence to truth and rejection of error (1 Peter 4:11; 2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Call

Like evangelists, teachers must be diligent to present themselves approved to God as workmen who have no need to be ashamed, but rather those who accurately handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:14-18).

Conclusion

Speaking of miraculous spiritual gifts, Paul said, “God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor. 12:27-31).

The age of miracles was of limited duration, lasting until the truth of the gospel was fully revealed (1 Cor. 13:8-13).

As possessors of the perfect law of liberty (James 1:21-25), and recipients of “the faith” once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), we now enjoy the abiding gifts of revelation, oversight and instruction (Eph. 4:7-11). Thanks be to God for His wonderful provision!