

The Gift that Unites Us

Ephesians 4:7-16

Halifax: 24 February 2008

Introduction:

Today, we return to our regular morning sermon series from Ephesians.

- And as we do, I want to take a moment to review what we have recently seen.

You will remember that chapter 4 begins with a general call to walk worthy of our calling...

- Walking worthy is going to be Paul's focus for the rest of this letter!
 - Having told us of the wonderful grace of God that has been given to us,
 - grace that takes us from the depths of sin and brings us into God's very own household—by redeeming us and then by transforming us to live as God's children...
 - He now calls us to walk worthy of so high a calling...
 - to walk as God's children ought to walk!

And he begins his exhortation by calling us to walk together as those who have been brought into the same household—

- There is one body and one Spirit, and we are called in one hope of our calling...
- one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
- one God and Father of us all who is above all and in us all...

And because we are only partially sanctified until we get to heaven,

- he calls us to bear patiently with each other...
 - We are to work together, bearing with one another's weaknesses, as we move on toward the goal that God has for us—
 - the goal that we should be perfected in Christ,
 - to love as He loved, to be holy as He is holy, to be perfect as He is perfect.
- Our tendency will be either to exclude our brethren whom God has made one with us because of sinful impatience...
 - or to wrongly embrace as brethren those who are not of the same Spirit and hope, of the same Lord, of the same faith, who have the same cleansing.

We desperately need God's grace if we are to walk together with one another in the one true faith.

- And in our text for today (Eph 4:7-16) teaches us that Christ has given us grace in such a way that we are brought together in mutual dependence.

- You can see in verse 7 that Paul says:
 - Eph 4:7: But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.
- Our Lord portions out His grace in such a way that no one of us is given all we need—we are given a measure of His gift...
 - This means that it is necessary for us to give and receive help from each other...
 - Those who are given more grace are to help those who have been given less.
 - To use an obvious example, parents are supposed to help their children to grow in the faith.
 - We must all be busy giving help and receiving help from each other according to our own callings and placement in the body...
 - We are brought together with those who are committed to Christ in such a way that we may help each other as we move toward the goal of being all that God's children are called to be.
 - I hope, by God's help, to adequately show you this gift of grace that unites us.

We will begin by looking at:

- What this gift of grace is...
- Then at how this gift of grace was given...
- And finally at what this gift of grace does

I. What is the gift of grace that Christ gives us?

A. Grace is God's favour that we don't deserve—

- that is the basic definition of grace...
 - but related to this and flowing out of this,
 - grace often refers to God's help...
- 1. You know, believers are often said to do things by the grace of God...
 - things like walking worthy of our calling in harmonious fellowship with our partially sanctified brothers and sisters!
 - Paul is speaking of grace here for that purpose...
 - as that which we have been given to enable us to move toward the goal of our becoming all that God calls us to be as His children...
 - and to do it together with our brothers and sisters in love.

TRANS> We are going to look more fully at what this gift of grace does later on...

2. But I think it is helpful to take a peek at that now—

- Verse 15 and 16 sum it up for us...
 - It says:
 - Eph 4:15-16: 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.
 - You see that Christ is the one who causes us grow into what God has called us to be by using us in each other's lives...
 - His grace comes to us through the other members of the body.
 - It is not as though we each have one pipeline for grace joined to Christ,
 - but it is rather that His grace flows into the body and then from one member to another in a great network of branches.
 - As I say, we will look at this more later...
 - but you see that the grace spoken of is a grace that enables us to grow as Christ's body into what God calls us to be.

TRANS> That is what this grace does...

- But what is it?

B. I submit to you that the gift of grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit—

1. Consistently, the New Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit as the gift that the Lord gives us.

a. For example, in Matthew 7:11, Jesus is quoted as saying:

- Mt 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"
- Matthew does not tell us what the good things are that He will give...
 - But in Luke 11:13, Luke quotes Jesus as saying:
 - Lu 11:13 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"
 - The good thing that we need most and that God gives us is the Holy Spirit.

b. Another passage that teaches this is Galatians 3 that we read last week...

- In verse 14, it says,
 - Gal 3:14: that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
 - You see here that the promise of the Spirit is the blessing that was promised to Abraham.
 - The gift of the Spirit is the summation of the whole promised blessing
- c. John the Baptist shows us this...
- When baptising, continually told the people that though he baptised with water,
 - the one coming after Him—Jesus—would baptise with the Holy Spirit.
- d. And then of course, in Acts, we find Jesus before He ascended telling His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father...
- And what is the promise?
 - It is the Holy Spirit...
 - You know how the Spirit falls upon them Acts 2 in fulfillment of the promise, and how Peter quotes from Joel where it says
 - “I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”
 - Peter further explains in Acts 2:32-33 that the Spirit is what Jesus has poured out according to the promise of the Father...
 - He says
 - Acts 2:32-33: This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

TRANS So you see that the promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit.

2. And now I want you to see further that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth...
- a. By that, I mean that He is the one who enables God’s word to get into us so that it transforms us and changes us—
 - So that it renews our minds and our lives so that we think and live according to it.
 - He is the one who causes us to grow in the unity of the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God...
 - b. In particular, the Spirit is the one who causes the ministry of the word to take place...because the Word is what transforms us...

- Look at what happened at Pentecost...
 - It was a speaking and a hearing miracle!
 - Everyone heard the word in his own language!
 - God was signifying that the new age that had dawned would be the age of the Spirit who would enable the word of God to be preached to all the nations!

- This is coordinate with what Jesus said about the Spirit... in John...
 - He said that after He ascended to the Father, He would send His Spirit to the Apostles,
 - and that the Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance that He had said to them... and guide them into all truth...
 - In other words, they would be ministers of the word who were able to speak the truth without error for God's people...
 - They would then be able to go forth in the power of the Spirit to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement!
 - To show them their need of Christ and the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to take away their sin.
 - This is exactly what they did after the Spirit was poured out on them.
 - The Spirit did a work in both the apostles as speakers, and in their hearers to enable the word to bring about conversion and growth.
 - There was a huge change in them!

- And it is by this same Spirit, given to the Church, that God's Word is blessed today so that our lives are transformed...
 - so that preaching brings forth fruit...
 - so that family worship brings forth fruit...
 - so that personal speaking of God's word to our neighbours and with one another brings forth fruit and causes growth.
 - so that even our living out of God's truth by the power of the Spirit has an impact on all those who see our example.
 - What a huge difference it makes for people to see God at work... for you to see Him at work in each other!
 - How we need to pray that He would work powerfully among us.

TRANS> So you see that the gift of grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit who enables us to minister and to receive the Word of God that we might grow thereby.

II. How was this gift of grace (that is, the Holy Spirit) given?

A. In verse 8, Paul points out that it was given when Christ ascended

- Eph 4:8: Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

1. We have already seen that in Acts...but Paul adds something here...

- He shows that the sending of the Spirit was something Jesus did as King after He had conquered His enemies and went up to take His throne...
 - He uses the language of a triumphal procession...
 - where a king would gather those he had conquered and lead them through the streets in a victory parade—often in chains...
 - And as He went along, He would distribute the spoils of war—the riches that had been taken from the conquered enemies—
 - He would distribute them among His people.

2. Paul refers to Psalm 68:18 where Israel is seen, returning from war with the spoils of victory with the ark of God...

- and the ark of God ascends the hill of Zion to return to the holy place in the temple—
 - God having come down from His throne on Mt. Zion to go into battle at the head of His people and defeat His and their enemies is now returning to His place.
- In the Psalm it says that He received gifts from men...
 - and of course these were received in order to be given to men...
 - and Paul speaks of this, saying that when Jesus ascended, He gave gifts to men...
 - as we have seen, He gave the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth who enables the truth to be spoken and conveyed.
 - This is what He obtained for the church when He conquered sin, Satan, and death for us.

B. In verses 9-10, Paul shows us the high price that the Lord Jesus had to pay in order that He might impart this gift to us...

- He points out that before Jesus could ascend, he had to first descend...
 - That is so true!

- The Son of God was already exalted as God over all...so He could not ascend any higher than he was—not until He first descended.
- He had to come down into this defiled sinful world before He could impart to us the gift of the Holy Spirit.
 - You know what was required of Him to atone for our sin...
 - He had to enter this world in our flesh...
 - He had to bear God's curse for us—
 - He, the one who is pure and holy, the one who is repulsed by sin more than we can ever understand who daily live in it...
 - He had to be charged with our sin and bear the rejection of God and the shame of that sin and the penalty of that sin...
 - And He did!
- Then He, in the human nature that He had taken to Himself, was able to rise victoriously as our Lord and King to sit at God's right hand...
 - to reign until all His enemies are subdued under His feet...
 - His elect through faith...
 - and all others through judgement.
- And after He had done all that was required for our salvation,
 - it was for Him, in taking His seat in glory, to pour out His Spirit upon the church so that the church would live...

C. Jesus predicted that He would do this in John 7 when He said...

- John 7:37-38: On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."
 - John explains that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit when He said this.
 - John 7:39: But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
1. And you see once again that this was something Jesus could not do until He was glorified—until He had finished His work...
- It was not until then that there was a gospel to proclaim!
 - It was only after He had completed His work for us on the cross and that work had been accepted that the gift of the Spirit was poured out to enable the church to proclaim the glorious Word.

2. And now, in the New Testament, it is through the preaching of the word that the church grows...
 - This is the primary means of growth...
 - It is through the Spirit-given ministry of the Word, preaching Christ and what He has done for His people that the church is made complete!
 - The Spirit could not be given in this way until our Lord had first come down to do His work, and then returned in victory
 - Certainly the Spirit was given to the Old Testament saints, but not as a gospel preaching Spirit...
 - Then He was given as a Spirit who set forth Christ in the shadows of the temple service...
 - but now as the Spirit who enables us to declare our Lord and Saviour to each other...
 - so that we may grow in unity of the faith and in the knowledge of Him to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
3. How thankful we should be!
 - How earnestly we ought to pray that the Word would flourish among us in the church and in our homes...
 - How eager we ought to be receive the Word of Christ which is the way He has appointed for us to grow...
 - And how careful we ought to be in ministering His Word to one another—
 - for what could be worse than to lead others away from Christ which we do when we do not speak by the Spirit given word.

III. And now I want to show you more fully what the gift of God's Spirit of grace does for us...

A. First, the gift of the Spirit makes men of clay into ministers of God's Word.

1. That's what we find in verse 11:
 - Eph 4:11: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,
 - The think that these all have in common is that they are ministers of the word...
 - Let's look at them...
- a. First, there are the apostles and prophets...

- They are the foundation of the church, as we saw in Eph 2:20.
 - This is so because they were uniquely given the Word of God in a way that none of the rest of us were...
 - according to measure of Christ's gift—its not the same for everyone.
 - And my brothers and sisters, the way we know Christ is through the inspired testimony that they have given to us in Scripture.
 - We learn of Christ through the Word, and it is to the Word that we must come to test everything we believe.
 - We must labour to have everything we believe and practice conform to the Word of God...
 - If you meet someone who has no interest in that, he is not a Christian.
- b. Secondly, there are mentioned the evangelists...
- These are the ones like Timothy or Titus who were given the task of taking the word of the apostles and prophets into various communities and establishing churches there...
 - They are missionaries who carry the Word to places it is not known.
 - They introduce the Word in new places—
 - or reintroduce it in places where it has been eclipsed.
 - They set the churches in order according the directives of scripture, establishing elders in each one to shepherd the people.
- c. Thirdly, there is mentioned the pastors and teachers that Christ has given to His church...
- These are the regular standing ministers in the church who regularly minister the word.
 - It is their task to explain and apply the scriptures to the hearers so that they can practice it and understand it.
 - The ministry of the apostles was confirmed by signs and wonders that they were given to perform and by the conformity of their teaching with those who had gone before—with the Old Testament...
 - They were imparting things that were newly revealed, so that is why they were given signs and wonders to confirm...
 - but the ministry of these pastor-teachers is confirmed by its conformity with the whole of scripture—with the teaching of the apostles...

- If they deviate from this, then they are to be rejected...
 - If their teaching is not in agreement with the truth of the apostles and prophets who gave us scripture,
 - then they are not promoting unity, but division... division from Jesus Christ Himself who is the Word.
2. And you can see the reason that Christ has placed these ministers in the church...
- They are the ones who bring His Word into the church so that the body will grow into what God wants it to be...
 - Inasmuch as these ministers of the word do their work faithfully,
 - They are given by the Lord to His church to bring the church to maturity in the faith...
 - You can see this in verse 12:
- a. They are said to be given “to equip the saints”...
- This is a bit of a soft translation—
 - the word speaks of repairing something that is broken (like a fishing net)
 - or restoring a dislocated limb...
 - It is clear from verse 13 that the ministers are charged with the responsibility to bring their hearers from ignorance to truth by the ministry of the word...
 - and to be brought by the word of the apostles from error to truth themselves.
- b. These ministers of the word are further said to be given for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ...
- As we are all in need of growth, we all need a constant diet of the word...
 - We need to feed upon it for the purpose of renewing our minds in order that we may live and believe in conformity to it.
 - This is the work of ministry and edification that the minister of the word is given to do.
3. And look at how long the ministry of the ministers of the word is to go on...
- You can see this in verse 13...
 - Eph 4:13: “till we call 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...”

- In other words, as long as the world stands, God will use the ministry of the Word for the perfecting of His people.
 - This means that you have serious obligation to listen to and receive the Word of God and to conform your faith and life to it...
 - You are to diligently examine what you are being taught and what you believe in the light of the scriptures...
 - Someone will say, well if I have to examine it, why bother with the pastor teacher? Why not just go straight to the Word?
 - Because God has appointed the pastor-teachers to help you...
 - They are to do the hard work of exegesis...
 - Then you are to evaluate what they say from scripture...
 - It is far easier to evaluate what you are being taught as to its conformity with scripture than it is to generate it...
 - When you are shown something from scripture, you can see it more readily than when you have to figure it out on your own.
- B. Paul goes on to speak further about the effect that the ministry of the Word has on us when it is Christ's ministry of the Word:
- We have already seen the main thing in verse 12 & 13...
 - it is supposed to bring us all together in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Christ.
 - It is supposed to move us toward perfection in our calling.
 - It is to set us straight...to bring out from sin to holiness...
 - 1. But verse 14 shows a further effect that the ministry of the word is supposed to have on you...
 - It is supposed to help you grow up so that we won't be like little children.
 - Jesus said it was good to have faith in Him like a little child...
 - but that does not at all mean He wants us to be immature like a child.
 - He was talking being those who receive what HE says with absolute confidence, and those who completely look to Him to take care of our salvation...
 - He was not encouraging us to be immature.
 - A child is easily deceived.
 - He can be led to believe almost anything...

- Paul describes such a one here as being tossed about like a little boat on a stormy that is tossed about by the waves.
 - or like straw that is blown in whatever direction the wind happens to be blowing...
- You know, like those who are not rooted and ground in the word—
 - You see it all the time...
 - Instead of growing strong in the word, they are always catching some new wind of doctrine...
 - First it is the prayer of Jebez that will make their life complete
 - then it is the purpose driven life...
 - then it is this new age teaching that Oprah Winfrey is endorsing that is all the rage.
 - On and on and on it goes—
 - When it is a simply regular diet of the Word of God that is needed!
 - It is not a quick and dramatic answer or formula...
 - It is the working into our very heart and life the word of truth.
 - It is the solid growth of the oak tree rather than a flash of lightening...
 - It is the slow work of reformation rather than the destructive work of revolution.
 - It is not the revival at the camp meeting, but the nourishment of God's truth over the years that brings the growth the Lord wants.

TRANS> When the ministry of the Word is going on, we won't be blown around all over the place...

- Instead, as verse 15 says,
- 2. We will speak the truth in love... growing up in all things into Him who is the head, even Christ.
 - When the word is flowing into our lives, it will have its effect...
 - The idea here is that as the Word is ministered to us, we are then able to begin living out the word...
 - The words "speaking the truth in love" are very helpful, for that is exactly what we begin to do as the word is ministered among us...
 - but it should be noted that the word "speaking" is not in the original.
 - It is literally that we will be "truthing in love"...

- or “doing the truth in love”...
 - “living, speaking, thinking the truth out in our lives.”
 - God’s word will increase in us and among us...
- Brothers and sisters, this is what we need!
 - Our lives and our fellowship is to be saturated with God’s word.
 - I am so glad when I see this in our fellowship times and in our families...
 - This is what Christ has appointed for us!
- When the Word is among us, we are able to begin to be a people who live the truth as God’s children...
 - The more we really understand the truth, the more we will love God, the more we will delight in Christ and His salvation, and the more we will live in harmony with each other...
 - we will grow up in all things in Christ...
 - We will become more and more like Him... a people who truth in love.

TRANS> So you see that ministers of the word are used to bring the word to us, and then the word begins to fill our hearts and our lives and our walk...

3. But see how verse 16 brings us back to Jesus Christ as the source of all our growth.
 - He is here described as the One...
 - Eph 4:16: 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.
 - It is Christ who places the ministers of the Word in the body and gifts each one for service...
 - And as the Word comes from the apostles to the pastors to the members,
 - it is then conveyed further from one member to another according to the way that Christ has arranged us in the body...
 - This arrangement is partly due to providence...
 - as He places children in Christian homes, and as He brings us into contact with those who minister to us in different ways...

- and partly due to obedience...
 - as we submit to the order He has appointed for us in the church and in the home...
 - and faithfully fulfil our ministry and faithfully receive the ministry He has appointed for us.
- Each member is to take his or her proper place in the body...
 - We are to function in churches according to His appointment—
 - with properly ordained ministers of the word under the oversight of Presbyteries,
 - with properly ordained elders whom God uses to help apply the preached word by their example and ministry...
 - with properly ordered families...
 - a promise being made to parents who train up their children and to children who honour their parents...
 - and as older women teach younger women to love their husbands and their children...
 - and as everyone takes his or her place according their respective callings and placements in the body.
 - All of us, living out God's word together, have a powerful impact in our community and in each others lives as we fulfill the calling that the Lord has given us.
- Deviation occurs in many ways...
 - One common example today is that of fathers who refuse to instruct their children.
 - The Lord has placed them as the head of their covenant home, and it is their duty to minister the word to their household...
 - When youth pastors and Sunday School teachers are substituted, it is not so much that God cannot use these,
 - but more that it is not according to the order that God has appointed for us.
 - Of course it can be argued that both can be done, but it seems to be the rule that as soon as we bring in our programmes, there is almost always neglect of the family worship that God has appointed...
 - for one reason, because we become busy with running our programmes...

- for another reason, because we tend to trust more in our own institutions than in Gods... and soon start to neglect his.
 - Another common deviation is in appointing to the ministry those that God has not called...
 - those who do not meet the scriptural qualifications given in Timothy and Titus...
 - which have as much to do with a man's life and character than with his doctrine.
 - When we presume that one who is not qualified according to the standard Christ has given can minister to us just fine...
 - we presume too much!
 - Some argue that David and Hosea were used of God in the Old Testament even though they did not meet the qualifications given in Timothy and Titus...
 - but God did not appoint these qualifications for the church to choose prophets and kings...
 - The church was never asked to choose prophets of kings...
 - The Lord Himself appointed them directly and He can appoint whomever He wishes...
 - But we are to submit to scripture and choose according to the guidelines that he has given.
 - The question is not if God **can** use a woman minister or a minister with a broken home...
 - The question is whether God has authorised that we appoint such persons to be our pastors.
 - We have to be careful whose ministry we follow.
- So you see that Christ uses us in each other's lives to cause each other to grow into all that He has called us to be...
 - It all goes back to Him as the source and author of our blessing...
 - It all comes from Him.
 - We are to look to Him and not to our own way.