

We are in part 2 of our study of **Chapter 4:7-16** which deals with the gifts that have been given to each of us for the building up of the body. As we studied, these gifts are referred to as a pouring out of His “grace” in our lives so that according to the measure in which He has gifted us we can serve others in love.

Thank God He pours out His grace on us otherwise we would not be able to serve one another in His agape love; we simply do not, on our own, have that ability. It never ceases to amaze me how utterly and entirely dependent we are upon God to do anything and everything. He asks us to serve one another with love and then He becomes our entire provision for us to walk in the manner worthy of our calling. Our obedience is really His.

Ephesians 4:7, 11-13

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ... HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." ... And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

Now before we dig into this first part of the passage, I want to say something that in a lot of circles would be considered to be troublesome. It is not uncommon for people to take this small list of “gifts” and create something out of it that the

Spirit was not intending. There is nothing in the context of this entire passage that should lead us to believe that the Spirit was somehow ordaining certain “offices” in the church (the office of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher) which are to be given some elevated status within the body of Christ. That is simply not the case. This list of gifting is just a small sub-set of the ways that Christ gifts the church, and it is not unlike the other lists that we find in **Romans 12:3-8** and **1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 28-31** which lists: the utterance of wisdom, the utterance of knowledge, faith, the ability to distinguish between spirits, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy, working of miracles, healers, helping, administration, various kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues.

In each passage dealing with gifts, the Spirit tells us that we are to be humble, never think more highly of ourselves than we ought—especially since everything we have has been given to us, so who are we to boast—**1 Corinthians 4:7**—and that we are to serve others and not ourselves. But whenever we create something like “offices” that are to be filled, we tend to naturally switch the focus from being a servant of others to having others serve us because of the position we hold and we slip into the pyramid (top down) form of leadership verses the circle [Diagram 1]. As a result, our gifts become first about ourselves and second about others.

This leads to the kinds of problems that the Spirit addressed in the letter to the Corinthians where they were very busy using their spiritual gifts but not according to the Spirit but according to their *Old Sinful Nature*, which just so happens to love anything that is religious. So do not be deceived, just because someone (including you) uses their gifts, and even gets dramatic results, does not mean that they are walking in the Spirit of God. Each of us has a choice and we can use our gifts to

build up the body of Christ or we can use them to build up ourselves, under the pretense, of course, of building up the body. I believe this passage in Romans captures the humility with which we are to have when we consider our use of any type of gifting.

Romans 12:3-8

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same **function**, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Now it is a biblical concept that there are “higher” gifts—apostle, prophets, teachers—and we should seek that God would give us these gifts (**1 Corinthians 12:27-28**). But again, understood in the context of the entire passage in Corinthians (as well as our passage in **Ephesians** and the above passage in **Romans**), the only reason they are considered to be “higher” is that these are the primary gifts used to plant churches and to grow a body into maturity; whereas,

so many of the other gifts support this work. But even then, they are “higher” in **function** only but not in status and position, which is why Paul always first considered himself to be a servant of others (**1 Corinthians 9:19, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Galatians 5:13, Romans 1:1**) and not some great leader which others are to serve. The Spirit knows that our tendency is to make things about ourselves and move away from the proper estimation of ourselves and deal with others out of power and authority, which is why those who have the **functional** “higher” gifts are exhorted as follows:

1 Peter 5:1-5

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; **nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge**, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; **and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another**, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.

So let’s take a moment to understand the role and function of the gifts in this list: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. First of all notice

that the gifting is not separated from the person. Both are considered to be the gift to the body of Christ. That is the how it is for all of us in our unique areas of gifting. You are important because the operation of your gifting, which we all need, cannot be separated from you. I need you, you need me, and you need each other!

First, apostle literally means one who is sent forth. It is the word that was used to describe how Jesus was sent forth from the Father (**John 17:3**) and the way the 12 were selected from the group of disciples and sent forth by Jesus (**Luke 6:13; 9:10**). In addition, even though Paul was not one of the twelve and did not meet the criteria that Peter had set forth for being an apostle in **Acts 1:22** (namely having been with Jesus from His baptism through His ascension), Jesus personally commissioned Paul as an apostle (**1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8-10**). The word is also used of James (Jesus' brother), Barnabas, Andronicus and Junias, Epaphroditus, Silas, Timothy, and Apollos (**Galatians 1:19, Acts 14:4, 14; Romans 16:7, Philippians 2:25, 1 Thessalonians 2:6, 1 Corinthians 4:6, 9**). Obviously the word "apostle" captures a much broader concept than just the original 12; so for those who think that there are no apostles today are not taking into context how the Spirit used this word.

In the context of the modern church, apostles are those who are "sent out" whether it is to plant multiple churches, to build up existing churches, or to oversee the spiritual health of other churches. Their gifting is intended to apply beyond just a local fellowship. And the authority of an apostle, based on the way Paul operated, is largely relational and not structural and it is within the context of deep relationship and trust that an apostle is able to best build up, exhort,

encourage, admonish, and instruct the church.

Second, prophets are given to the church to provide edification, exhortation, and comfort (**1 Corinthians 14:3**). We have seen that in operation many times here in our own fellowship. God has given us people who see visions and receive prophetic utterances from the Lord. This has provided many of us a view of how God sees us; and those pictures are absolutely beautiful and comforting to the soul. Some of these visions have served the purpose of building up someone who is in the midst of a battle and encouraging them to be strong, faithful, and to cling to Jesus no matter what might be happening. They have given us hope for the outcome of the trials that God takes us through. They have even been used to exhort us in our walk with Him. For example, I was exhorted through a prophetic word to stop trying to provide for myself but to throw my net on the right side of the boat (I get to fish only when He tells me to) and trust Jesus with my provision. And another time I was exhorted to have nothing to do with some prospective business partners as they were evil and corrupt. We are so blessed that God has chosen to speak to us in this way and has given us these gifts.

Third, the evangelists have a unique gift to spread the gospel to unbelievers. I know for many of us just the thought of going and sharing the gospel with someone chills our bones, but there are those to whom it is so easy and natural. My brother Eric is definitely one of these evangelists. He can strike up a conversation with anyone and before long he is telling them about Jesus; and he does it so naturally. I have seen some of you here do that as well. What a tremendous gift which God uses it to build, horizontally, the church body.

Fourth, are the pastors and teachers. They are listed together because in the

Greek the Spirit does some things a bit different than with the other descriptions. The “and” which connects pastors and teachers is a different word than the “and” that separates the list: apostles “and” prophets, etc. In addition, “the” is used before pastors and not before teachers. Therefore, most people think that the Spirit meant us to understand these two gifts collectively—“the pastors and teachers.” This would also be consistent with **1Timothy 3:2** and **Titus 1:9** where the elders of the church, those responsible for its care, must be able to teach and accurately handle the word of God.

The role of a pastor is generally that of a shepherd and is primarily concerned with the vertical versus the horizontal growth of the body. The Pastor is to look out for the spiritual health and welfare of a settled congregation, which is a bit different from apostles, prophets, and evangelists whose gifts often apply or are used in a broader context.

The pastor should be very hands on and involved in the life of the sheep entrusted to his care. Too often we think that a pastor is just to show up on Sundays and teach a sermon, shake our hands, and do our weddings. But that is not what the Spirit intends. In many ways, the pastor is to be the means by which others practically experience Christ’s personal touch in their lives and the one through whom they learn how they too can know Him and experience Him for themselves. One should be able to see Jesus at work both in and through a pastor.

Since the role of pastor is very hands-on, it is also very individualized as it needs to be able to address the spiritual condition of a whole variety of people. To some the pastor is an encourager, to others he is one who brings correction and discipline, to others he teaches the truth and shows the way in which they should

walk, and so on. It is very multifaceted and you cannot really draw a box around it as a shepherd needs to be willing to move as the Spirit leads for the purpose of drawing people deeper into Jesus.

This role is so important because as much as you would like to think that you have a handle on your relationship with God, that you have things under control, and that you don't really need someone "telling" you their opinion about your relationship with God, you are gravely mistaken. You have not been gifted with spiritual independence—that's not even a gift. Until we attain to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, we all need this role in our lives in one way, shape, or form. We need someone to help us see what we cannot see, to help us identify the places where we have been deceived into believing that we trust God but really just trust ourselves.

The pastor must also be able to teach. In this context the gift of teaching is uniquely, but not exclusively, tied to the function of a pastor, for it is imperative that a pastor leads those in his care to Jesus and to the truth and not to someone or something else that is a shadow of the truth. Thus, a pastor is to know the word and accurately handle the word so he does not inadvertently distort the truth and lead others in wrong belief.

Now, just so you know, there are those who are gifted teachers but are not pastors and they have a huge role in many contexts, but in this passage the Spirit ties the teaching gift to the role of pastor so we can understand more fully what the Spirit expects of a pastor.

Now each of these gifts has been given to the body of Christ for:

- 1) The equipping of the saints for the work of service. In other words, when the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers do their appointed jobs, those in the body of Christ are able to do what they have been gifted to do which is to use their gifts to serve others in love.
- 2) The building up of the body of Christ both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally in that Spirit desires people to be brought to Jesus so they can enter into a saving relationship with Him. Vertically in that the Spirit desires people to learn to live as if Jesus is truly their “I Am” – their absolute provision for everything in this life. The vertical work is what the Spirit has asked me to do as a pastor/teacher; and, as you know, that work is intense and often uncomfortable as it requires me to deal with all those places in your soul where you still trust yourself and act as your own God and are not trusting Jesus to be your “I Am.”

Now each of us are to continue in our service of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

I think the best way to sum up the “unity of the faith” is that point in time when we attain to an experiential understanding that only God is good (therefore, we can conclude that we are not God and we must stop acting like God and let Him have control of each and every little room in our hearts), that Jesus is our perfect provision for everything, and that He has provided us Himself and therefore we have everything we need for life and godliness.

With regard to attaining the “knowledge of God,” there is a marvelous passage in 2 Peter which talks about all the wonderful promises that have been given to us

in Christ and how they are experienced in the true knowledge of Christ:

2 Peter 1:2-5

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

So, in Christ, we have been given everything we need for life and godliness (which is exactly what we learned in ***Ephesians 1-3***), but it is experienced or known through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is through a complete understanding of Jesus that we get to partake of His divine nature (live from the *New Creation*) and thereby escape the corruption that is in the world.

Now, I want to be absolutely clear; I am not talking about an intellectual understanding of Jesus or the Bible. Anyone can learn knowledge, but our power is in the knowing; it is in the intimacy of relationship—it is in experiencing Jesus as our God trusting Him and living daily as if He is our “I AM.” For example, I can know that Jesus is my peace, I can say He is my peace, I can preach that Jesus is my peace, but until I experience Him as my peace to me it is nothing more than just words and a hopeful ideal.

This is why we have spent so much time talking about the doors in the corridor

of our souls that have been closed due to the pain, hurt, rejection, and terror that we have experienced in our lives. Every closed door is a place where we do not know Jesus in the experiential way and in that room our “faith” is not really “faith” at all in terms of the biblical understanding, but it is more akin to knowledge and a form of religious belief. True faith is lived when we “bet our lives” on the truth about Jesus. For example, if He says that He is our comfort, He is our protector and He is our defender, then why do we keep the doors closed and stand guard as if we are our own comfort, protector and defender.

I have talked with many of you and I know that God is pushing on you right now to open yourselves up and give yourselves to the people in this fellowship in true intimacy and trust. He wants you to trust others and to love others and to let yourself be loved by others. But that is a bit too scary for that means you have to once again make yourself vulnerable in those places where you have been so wounded in the past: hurt by parents, friends, loved ones, etc. You know that Jesus is knocking but you stiffen your grip on the door handle and you will not turn it; you keep the door closed to others (and to God) as a way to protect yourself. But in that area of your life, your experience with God (and with others) is still empty and shallow and is little more than a religious experience. As a result, in those areas of your life, you are not able to love others with God’s agape or receive God’s agape love as He lives through others.

But Jesus is knocking and for some of you He is knocking quite loudly. He wants you to have true knowledge of Him in that room. He wants you to know by experience that He will be your protector, your defender and your comforter. He wants you to be so convinced of this truth that even if others do hurt you in the

same painful ways, you know that you can run to Him and He will be there to fill you, strengthen you, and give you everything you need. He wants you to know His love and have His love fill that room to overflowing such that others benefit from your true knowledge of God.

The fruit of knowing Jesus in this way and betting your life not on the ability of others to do it “right” (or even your ability to do it right) but on His ability to always be right for you, is that as He fills you up room by room. Eventually you will become mature and you will be filled with the fullness of Christ and by definition measure up to His standard (which by the way is to be like Him and to live as He lived). This is His goal for our lives and it is really possible! This is the way pathway to loving others as He loved.

Ephesians 4:14-16

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Why would people be involved in such trickery and deceit? Perhaps it is because they don't even understand the concept of the *New Creation* and how to

live from it, so they keep trying to live from the religious part of their *Old Sinful Nature* and thereby get caught up in the struggle to do it “right” thus they have to keep trying to find new ways to experience success in the Christian life. Perhaps they do not know that, regardless of how much religion they practice or what position and title they hold, if they do not live from their *New Nature* which has been created in the image of Christ, they live from their *Old Sinful Nature* and, by definition, are tools for the enemy. And since everything comes wrapped in Bible talk and “good” religion, they are easily deceived and end up serving themselves instead of others.

Then there are those who do not fall into the category of being deceived and are truly out to deceive. They want power, prestige, control over people and resources, and they want a kingdom they can call their own, a kingdom in which they can be glorified. The word we have translated “scheming” literally means to lie in wait and is understood to be the methods used to deceive. It is the same word used in ***Ephesians 6:11*** when the Spirit talks about the wiles or the schemes of the devil. The point is that since those who do not walk in the Spirit of God are subject to the prince of the power of the air, there is really no way to separate the schemes of the devil from the schemes brought about through these men and women.

They set traps with the bait of “religion” and patiently wait to spring that trap. Their bait is juicy and seems to make sense: it is up to us to do it “right.” And they flavor the bait with doctrines of obedience, duty, discipline, holiness, submission, accountability, and so on, so that it looks and smells and tastes very tantalizing to that part of us that still wants to be like god and wants to be able to

control the outcomes of our lives. But once we bite we actually become enslaved to their control over our lives as they are the ones who determine whether or not we are doing it “right”—and no matter how hard we try it never seems to be enough; more is always required.

These “winds of doctrine” and “trickery of men” encompasses everything and anything that takes away from, distorts, or dilutes the true knowledge of Jesus; for such teachings and practices always have the result of destabilizing us and keeping us confused, teeter tottering back and forth, in conflict with each other, and constantly striving to find the next thing in an attempt to bring life to what is often just an impotent form of Christianity.

This brings us full circle to what we have learned in **Chapters 1-3**. These are the truths that will dismantle every false teaching and twisted doctrine that has kept us enslaved to ourselves and to the trickery of the enemy. These truths will grow us up in all aspects into Jesus. Thus, we are to *know* these truths in that we are to personally experience their power in our lives by choosing to let them be our reality despite what we may otherwise think or feel. This is why God carefully and strategically brings about circumstances in our life that put us in the position where we get to learn why it is so much easier to believe His truths and trust ourselves to Jesus than to walk in these distortions.

Have you noticed that most of the distortions which take us captive and toss us to and fro always place the responsibility and burden of doing it “right” squarely on our backs. This is the foundation of the “religion” of Christianity. However, since we cannot be “good” (for only God is good), we constantly bounce back and forth between trying to control our lives and resting in the truth. As a result, we

are as unstable as children and it's a miserable existence. Just over the last few of weeks I have heard many such distortions; maybe you will recognize a few that you have believed:

- We are not convinced that Jesus really loves us in the way He describes. We can accept it in theory but it is far disconnected from our moment-by-moment experience.
- We do not see ourselves as this phenomenal masterpiece that God Himself created and in which He is entirely pleased.
- We don't believe that since our *New Creation* has been created in His image we are beautiful beyond description.
- We are not convinced that others can or will love us the way Jesus does; therefore, we are afraid to give ourselves to others or to trust them.
- We constantly internalize and personalize the dysfunction and brokenness of others and totally forget who we are in God and we let their brokenness define what we think about ourselves versus what God has said about us.
- We are not convinced that Jesus is really involved in the details of our lives and that He works **all things** out according to the **kind** intention of His will so we worry, we fret, and we foolishly attempt to control the outcomes of our lives not believing that He is our Gatekeeper and our Good Shepherd.
- We believe that God is not talking to us; thus, He is obviously the problem.
- We believe that if God does not jump when we say jump that we have to handle things and make decisions because, after all, life must be lived.
- We don't really believe that every thought, every motive, every feeling, and

every behavior which does not derive from God (who is good) derives from the desires of our flesh and of the mind (which is not good) and is therefore sin and the root of all sinful behavior.

- We believe that our battle is with behavioral sin and so we find ourselves in a war that we cannot win and we conclude that this is just our lives and that we will likely always struggle in these ways.
- When we sin we believe that God is mad at us, disappointed in us, or withdraws from us in some way shape and form and so we get mad at ourselves for blowing it again and we seek ways to make it up to God.
- There are even some who believe that if they have a continual struggle with sin that they can actually lose their salvation. The fact that God gave it to them by grace seems to be lost on them. Thus, they live in perpetual fear and striving and they know no peace.
- We believe that there is a right way and a wrong way to do all things and that if we do not do it “right” we are failures and are doomed to always fail.
- We believe that if we fail then we missed the train, so to speak, and everything in our future is hopeless. We do not believe that God has us on a journey and that He will finish the work He has started.
- We can grasp that we are forgiven but we have such a hard time forgiving ourselves because of the impact that our choices have on others. We don’t understand that God uses even our failures to effect His purposes in their lives.
- We don’t believe that we are assured of a **glad** welcome every time we go to the Father and so we often tend to avoid talking to Him.

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- We believe that God values our efforts to please Him, so we get busy doing the “work of the ministry” and substitute effort for relationship; thus, we want God to give us credit for our good intentions and valiant attempts at doing what we think He wants verses doing only what we know He wants.
 - We believe that knowing the will of God is a pipe dream and therefore we conclude that we just need to use the brains God has given us and make the best decisions we can.
 - We don’t really believe that we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing and given everything we need for live and godliness; thus, we strive to be good enough hoping to experience His promises.
 - We don’t believe that all God wants from us is to believe the truth in every nook and cranny within the corridors of our souls and so we keep our doors shut, pretend to be god, and then go out and try to be good Christians.
 - Then again we know that God only wants us to believe the truth in every nook and cranny within the corridors of our souls but we are scared to death and do not believe that if we open those doors that He will do His part, especially since He is the one who let us get hurt in the first place.
 - We do not believe that we have authority over the enemy and we live as if we will never be able to silence the voices that continually speak lies into our minds.
 - We have a hard time believing that we belong to God—that we are His personal possession and part of His household.

And to think I came up with these based on recent conversations. This is why we are exhorted to speak the truth in love. We must be reminded of what is real

and what is false. We must be reminded that our feelings are just “feelings” and our thoughts are just “thoughts” and they do not create our reality. We must help each other learn to stand in the truth.

Have you thought about the fact that it says we must “speak” the truth in love. There is something very powerful that happens when we engage our mind, our soul, and our body in professing the truth. For instance, if you are being attacked with some of these ridiculous deviations and you actually speak—out loud—the truth, you will find that you will silence those voices for they will have no place to stick as your mind, soul, and body are preoccupied with the truth.

I have also found that even though I may not be struggling at the moment, as I speak these truths aloud to others that it also encourages and builds up my faith and reminds me why I believe. That is why I have given each of you a copy of the truths we studied in **Chapters 1-3** so you can carry them around with you and actively use them for I have found that if I try to battle in the thoughts of my mind (without actually speaking) that it is hit or miss in terms of successfully silencing the voices. So engage your voice and speak the truth in love.

Going back to those distortions of the truth, many of them are gross deformations are not just these slight twists. This just speaks to the fact that we must continue to draw near to God and let Him use our gifts to build each other up and keep each other safe. It is far too easy to get wrapped up in the lies and try and do things on our own. That is why we have to be committed to each other and be willing to trust ourselves to one another. You see the whole body is held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part. Therefore, like it or not we need each other and are dependent

upon each other—it is a statement of fact evidenced by how hard the enemy wars against it.

And we must continue in this way until we attain to the full measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. We are in this together; and together we can experience victory and enjoy His love as it is expressed through our brothers and sisters in Christ. But our victory starts when we open the doors and let Jesus establish His truth in every part of our souls. So let's help each other in this process and remind each other way we can believe.

Let's Pray

Diagram 1

