

Christ's Gifts to Men

by Tim Conway

This sermon from Ephesians 4 emphasizes the importance of unity in the body of Christ, highlighting the diversity of spiritual gifts given by Christ for the common good. It encourages believers to walk in a manner worthy of their calling, to be actively involved in using their gifts to build up the church, and to not bury or neglect the grace given to them. The message urges believers to be intentional in fanning into flame the gifts they have received, to be faithful in serving others, and to strive for a hundredfold impact rather than settling for minimal realities.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 4:7, 1 Corinthians 12:4, Luke 19:12, 2 Timothy 1:6, Hebrews 10:24, Galatians 6:9, Matthew 25:14

Topics: "Unity in the Body of Christ", "Stewardship of Spiritual Gifts"

Description

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Transcript

Okay, we're back in Ephesians. So if you want to turn to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4. I think a very practical message as we start the new year. May the Lord use it in our lives, this message, these Scriptures, as much as anything.

Ephesians 4, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love. As we've been talking about for numbers of weeks, this section of Scripture has to do with the unity of the Spirit. Paul starts his practical portion of Ephesians by giving really the best part of these first 16 verses to this idea of unity.

Verse 3, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And here is what undergirds our unity. Here's the oneness behind our unity.

There's one body. That's the church. One Spirit.

The Holy Spirit of God. Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord Jesus Christ, one faith, there's one faith that justifies, there is one baptism. This one Spirit baptizes us into one body as 1 Corinthians 12 says.

There is one God and Father of all. So we see this. Our unity is essentially bound to the doctrine of the Trinity.

People who do not embrace the Trinity are not in unity with the true one body. They do not embrace the one faith. There is one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all, but grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore it says, when He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men. Now you can see, most of your Bibles, I think probably all of your Bibles have parentheses at the beginning of v. 9 and at the end of v. 10. That parenthesis is something that I want to deal with perhaps next week, but not today.

But we'll read it nevertheless. V. 8, therefore it says, when He ascended on high, He led a host of captives and He gave gifts to men. You see v. 7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

V. 8, He gave gifts to men. Skip the parenthesis and you have v. 11, He gave. And here's some of the gifts that He gave.

Let's hit the parenthesis for a second. In saying He ascended, what does it mean that He had also descended into the lower regions of the earth or the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. And He gave back to this topic in Paul's view here, the giving of gifts to men, He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ.

Father, I pray for help to speak, unction to speak. I pray for ears to hear. Lord, I pray that this whole mystery of preaching would accomplish Your purposes in this place today.

I ask that in Christ's name. So, v. 7, the title of my message, Christ's Gifts to Men. That's not really profound.

It's based on these verses. You can see that. But the interesting thing here that I want you to catch is the word, but.

If you use that at the beginning of v. 7, it's an abruptness. It's like everything was so smooth and flowing with regards to unity and that which unifies, but. It's like He puts the brakes on.

Because this implies a contrast. This is what you say to introduce something that seems to oppose what you were just saying. We're all unified by one body, by one Spirit, by one hope, by one Lord, by one faith, by one baptism.

If you're a genuine Christian, we're unified by one God and Father of all Who is over all, through all, in all. But, it's like screeched to this shift. But, yes, unity.

Yes, oneness. But, there's differences. That's really what He's going to say now.

But, that doesn't make us all identical. You see it. But, grace was given to each one of us.

You see, He's been talking about our unity as a whole. Screeched to a stop with that thought for a second to say, but, if we isolate any one of you individually, you have something from Christ that nobody else has exactly. He is measuring and distributing gifts.

Grace, it's called, to each one of us. And then you can see what He says. He gives apostles.

Are all apostles? No. He gives prophets. Are all prophets? No.

You see, this individual distribution is a reality among us. Unity does not imply uniformity, identicalness, indistinguishability. Notice the words.

Look at v. 7. Each one of us. What's He saying about each one of us? Well, we're different. Yes, one.

Yes, united. There's one body. Absolutely.

There's one God, but there's variety. There's different amounts of grace. And here's the thing, we need to fight.

Remember what v. 3 says? We need to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. We need to fight for that reality, to maintain that unity. Yes, fight to maintain the unity.

I mean, you go down a little bit and v. 13, unity of the faith, unity of the knowledge of the Son of God, unity in the fact that we're all pursuing maturity to build up, to edify. Yes, there is one God. There is one Spirit.

There is one body of doctrine. There is one way that we're all justified. There's one way that we're all saved.

But the reality is, the church is not made up of a bunch of cookie-cutter replicas of each other. That's what he's saying. We need to fight for unity, yes, but we need to fight for the unity that comprehends this diversity.

But, but, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. We're essentially one, but each of us is different. And Paul would have us to keep both of these realities straight in our minds.

United, but different. You see, I would argue for this. I was convinced early on in the life of this church, Lord, give us rich and poor.

Give us black and white. Give us the converted prostitute and the converted lawyer. Give us this.

Lord, well, You probably don't want to know some of the things that I've prayed for. They might make You nervous. Perhaps by the end of this message, You'll recognize what I mean by that.

But I would argue this way. I would argue that the more diverse we are, the more variety you can find in any given church and still be under the umbrella of maintaining the unity of the Spirit, the more healthy that church is. Now you have to hear what I just said.

We have to stay within the confines of maintaining the unity of the Spirit. If you're so diverse that you come out from under that umbrella, you're not part of us. That's not what I'm talking about.

What I'm talking about is this. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit, but within that, having the greatest amount of diversity and variety possible, that makes for the most glorious manifestation of what a church can be and should be. Where do I get that from? I get that from the same apostle who wrote these words.

Have you ever heard him say? He says there's varieties of gift, but the same Spirit. He says there's varieties of ministries, but the same Lord. There's varieties, and the word actually has to do with energy level or ability.

The variations in ability. But there's one God. And we have this manifestation of the Spirit.

This is all from 1 Corinthians 12. Paul says we have all these different manifestations of the Spirit for the common good. And you see, this is the issue.

He says, to one is given. Now notice that. You can stay there in Ephesians, but just hear it.

Notice it by what I'm saying to you. I'm quoting Scripture here. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom.

Through one. So maybe it's that guy there. To one is given.

And then he says, and to another, the utterance of knowledge. That guy right there. Now that doesn't mean that there can't be three that have it, but because there's variations of gift and variations of ministry and variations of ability, he may not have it as much as he has it.

He may have it more than both of them. Or, he may use it in that ministry. He may use it in that ministry.

And that other guy back there may use it in another. To one is given. It doesn't mean that there can't be three or five in the same church.

But here's the reality. If you don't have anybody that has that, that's not good. And that's not healthy.

To remove variety isn't good. It's not for our common good. It's like taking limbs off the body.

Evan just recently showed me a paramedic photo. I don't advise you to look at his paramedic photos. It was a motorcycle accident and the guy had his legs torn off.

But that is what the church is like because the church is like a body. And you start taking things away and you know what you're going to end up with? That was not a nice sight. And you start taking pieces and components and members and that guy that has that one gift and that sister that has that gift and you start removing them from the church, you know what you end up with? Something that is disfigured.

Something that's not as pretty. Something that's not as glorious. You don't want to remove the variety.

If the whole church were an eye, can you imagine that? Can you imagine a body that's just all eyeballs? The last thing we want to be is the church of the eyeball. If you're an eyeball, go there. But the church of ears, they're like somewhere else.

But this is the way Paul talked. But, listen, it is not a divisive concept to say that we've got people in the church that are feet, people that are hands, people that are heads, people that are eyes, people that are ears. That is not a divisive concept to emphasize that variety and that difference.

Do you know what a divisive concept is? It's when all the eyes say, well, we're going to get together and go do our thing over there because we don't like the people that aren't like us. Now that's divisive. When you say, well, I'm going to go somewhere where everybody's like me.

Well, you can do that, but I'll tell you what, if you go to a church where everyone's like you, that's not a healthy church. And what you're really doing is you're probably taking away something that the church you were in desperately needs. Because you were basically looking around and saying, well, people here aren't like me.

Well, that's all the more reason to stay. I mean, if an eyeball looks around and says, well, there's no eyeballs here! I'm getting out of here! You see what you've just done? You've blinded the church. Don't do that.

Do you know why Paul has to argue like this? He's not arguing like this in Ephesians 4, but he's arguing like this in 1 Corinthians 12. Do you know why he argues like that? I'll tell you why. There's a natural disposition that rises up in people to look down on and scorn people that aren't like me.

Or at least to make me feel uncomfortable. I want to be able to identify. I want to be where people are like I am.

Listen, it's very common for rich people. Well, we're going to go where people are important. We're going to go where there's doctors and there's lawyers and where people are more in our social position.

Do you know if you're in a poor church and you're rich and God has given you the gift of generosity, what a valuable thing. I mean, I remember being down at Community Baptist Church. It was a poor little church in the middle of the fields.

But God brought John Seitzman there. He didn't run off to be where all the wealthy and the famous and the congressmen. That was extremely valuable to that church.

The educated. Well, they want to go where people are like they are and have the same collegiate level and the same degrees. And I'll tell you this, in the early church, do you know who some of the most educated were, at least when it came to Scripture, were the Jews because they knew the Old Testament Scriptures.

And those churches to have Jews who didn't run off to go to their Jewish church, but remained among the Gentiles with that superior Old Testament wisdom, oh, I'll tell you how valuable that would be. Or you think of the Hellenists. They're in Jerusalem.

They didn't run off. Well, the Grecian widows are not being taken care of. We're getting out of here.

I mean, can you imagine if all those Hellenists, but they didn't do that. They were there. No matter why there was a place for them to fill, they were able to take care of the Grecian widows.

You see, you just rob the church when it's like we're out of here. People aren't like us. That's not healthy.

The best thing is having a church that is as diverse. But remember, we have to stay within this maintaining the unity of the Spirit. It means no matter how different you are in gift, no matter how different you are in economic status or IQ or skin color or whatever, we all have to remain within this unity of the Spirit.

Well, a body is most complete and healthy. I know this. Now you can argue all day long and all into the night, and some of you will after this message, I don't doubt.

But listen, if there is a gift of wisdom, I want it in this church. If there's a gift of knowledge, I want it in this church. If God gives a gift of healing to anybody today, I want it in this church.

I want there to be as broad, as wide. And I'll tell you this, beware of underestimating. Look at what the text says.

4-7, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. You should be very, very careful before you boldly declare what graces Christ will bestow on His churches today. You just listen to Paul.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom. To another, the utterance of knowledge.

Same Spirit. To another, faith. Not just you're a believer.

This is an extraordinary gift of faith. To another, gifts of healing. By one Spirit.

To another, the working of miracles. To another, prophecy. To another, ability to distinguish between spirits.

To another, various kinds of tongues. To another, interpretation of tongues. God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles and gifts of healing, helping, administration in various kinds of tongues.

And you know one of the surest ways to cripple a church? Just dogmatically, dogmatically assert that Christ no longer creates bodies with left feet. Just insist that. Nope.

Left feet belong to another age. Yes, you can go to the book of Acts and they had left feet back then, but not now. Not today.

So, a body with a left foot today gets ignored. It gets scorned, despised, ridiculed, even accused of being heretical. Not biblical.

Here's a left foot right there in the church. But some famous radio preacher says there aren't left feet in the church anymore. I just say this, be careful brethren.

He does not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Listen, I'll tell you this, you turn off the radio preacher, no matter how famous he is, and go to your Bibles. If you have a strong argument from Scripture, okay.

But don't tell me what that preacher said or what that theological system believes. Go to your Bibles. Because I'll tell you this, if there's gifts that Christ gives to His church today that we may be graced with today, but the reason we don't have it is because half the people in here despise it.

And if it were ever to show up, they'd be jumping up and down and saying it's not true, it's not good, it's bad, it's a perversion, it's got to be fake, it's not for today. That'll be one of the quickest ways that you can destroy the variety and the diversity that God may otherwise give to the church. Just be careful.

I'm just telling you, be biblical. If you've got reason from Scripture to believe that something is not for today and you can prove it and you can dogmatically stand on Scripture, so be it. But formulate your beliefs, your faith, your doctrine from Scripture, not simply from what people, even as much as we respect them, may say.

There are a lot of people out there that'll throw cold water on variety in the church. I don't want that stolen from us, brethren. Look, I'm not going to say that I know everything that Christ is pleased to give to the church today, especially right here in San Antonio beginning of 2019.

And could it be that some churches that are out there on the front lines like the church in China might need that we don't need? I think, yes, I recognize that could be true. Is it possible that out on the missionary front lines they may need gifts of tongues that perhaps is not necessary here where most of us speak all the same tongue or we've got an interpreter in back that's doing translation? Perhaps. But I know this, if Scripture's telling me that there are gifts like this and there is no satisfactory argument from Scripture to say that these things don't exist anymore, then brethren, let us embrace, let us ask for the fullness, for the greatest variety.

I want variety. I want everything that Christ is willing to engrace us with. Next thing I want you to see is that word grace.

Ephesians 4.7 Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Brethren, I want to emphasize something again. I have emphasized this in the past.

I want to emphasize it again. When you hear the term grace, don't just think unmerited favor. Think power. Power. Effectual, enabling, effective, operative. That's what the grace of God is.

I mean, just look back at chapter 3, verse 7. You see it? Ephesians 3, verse 7. Of this Gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace. There it was. Gift, grace, which was given me, how? By the working of His power.

Yes, grace is unmerited favor, but it's always effective. Listen, I want you to realize something. Christianity is real.

It's not just something that you decide you're going to do. Christianity is something that happens to you. This is something that happens to you.

Every one of us, if you are converted, if you come into the Kingdom, if you have been saved by the grace of God, if you have been raised from the dead with Christ, then know this, you are the recipient of some grace. Some measured gift of Christ's grace has been given. Every one of us.

There's no exception. This is powerful. Listen, what this asserts and emphasizes is that if you are a genuine Christian, you have been saved from uselessness.

He has saved you to be useful to the church. That's a guarantee. When Christ gives grace, this is the working of His power.

This is Christ enabling you to do something with supernatural capacity to serve others. It isn't you being enabled to do something that you were not able to do before you were saved. This is not simply a physical ability.

This isn't some ability that you had previous to being saved. Now, He may take abilities you had previous to being saved, and it may work with your spiritual gift. That may be true.

But the reality is, this is power that is being demonstrated in the life of each one of us. Listen, notice Ephesians 4.11. This is a sampling of His gifts right here. He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers.

And notice what the result is. To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. Do you see the power being demonstrated? These men exercise their gifts, and what happens? People are changed.

It's the grace of God flowing through. That's what a grace is. It's you being enabled to transmit God's grace to others.

Something flows through you. It's supernatural. It's powerful.

And it's for the common good. It's for the good of all of us. So, listen, am I saying that all these exist today? Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers, or pastors, teachers? Listen, I do not believe that there are apostles who are being given revelation to add to the canon of Scripture.

Let me be absolutely clear on that. We have a closed canon. Scripture ends with the book of Revelation.

You add to those words, you're in trouble. Let me tell you this, the term apostle is basically the Greek equivalent to the Latin *missio* from which we get missionary. If you try to go look for missionary in your Bibles, you're not going to find it like that based on the Latin.

What you're going to find is the term apostle. They both mean somebody who's sent. Somebody sent on a mission.

That's what both words mean. I like the way Brother Andy says it. He believes that in Scripture, there is a capital A Apostle and there are small a Apostles.

I like that distinction. Can I tell you this? Do we need men and women who have the ability to plunge into the darkness and take the Gospel in there and seek to bring light and seek to plant churches and seek to make disciples, seek to train men? We need that. You can call it what you want, but we need that.

How about prophets? Listen, if you just rule out prophecy today, you basically have to say this, that the text that says do not despise prophecies, test everything, hold fast, what is good? That doesn't matter today. That doesn't apply to us today. You have to say that there in 1 Corinthians 14 right at the beginning when it says pursue love, earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

You just have to write them off. Say they don't exist anymore. I'll tell you what, you can do that, but one of the things I desire is that God would give us men who stand in the pulpit with some degree of prophetic element to their preaching.

You say, what does that mean? I mean men that can stand up and have a word from God. I'm talking about men that as they preach, God works in their mind and through their tongue to say things to you that weren't necessarily put in the notes when they were studying. It's something God gives them.

Reformed guys call it light on their feet. Again, I don't care what you call it. I don't care what corner you want to move for safety.

You can call it prophecy. We're going to be wild-eyed charismatics. Listen, I don't care what you call these things, but we need them.

God, help us! What do you want? The guy that's just the scribe comes up and tells you what Spurgeon says and what Piper says and what MacArthur says? Is that what you want? Somebody that basically reads verbatim from their notes in monotone? You want that? You want just scribes to stand in the pulpit? I don't. I want somebody with a word from God. Yes, it comes from here.

But somebody that stands up. You know men who have that kind of gifting. That when they preach, it's like, man, there are some guys, yeah, their doctrine's right.

They can dot the I and they can cross the T in the right place. But there are some men when they stand up, you ever been in that situation? You ever been under sermons that have changed your life for eight months? For a year and a half? For the rest of your life? It's like, wow! I mean, I remember one time, it was Brother Andre. We had a missionary from China come and speak in the Men's Grace House.

And he came up to me afterwards. He says, does he always preach like that? And I said, like what? I knew exactly what he meant, but I just wanted to hear him describe it. There are men like that.

It's like, do they always preach like that? And you're like, you all know what they mean. We need that, brother. Well, you can call it whatever you want.

Evangelists, are they for today? Are there lost people today? I pray God, give us evangelists. Pastor, teacher, I'll tell you this. If God basically created the church to walk on four legs, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor, teachers, and you go shave off three of the legs all the time and you're trying to create churches to run around on one leg when they're supposed to have four, you know what you end up with? You end up without that variety and you end up with an unhealthy church.

Listen, search your Bibles. Embrace Scripture. Sometimes we talk about God calling us to something.

Am I called? I'll tell you this, you can't get away from this reality, but there is a design for you. Calling has the idea of we're hearing this voice. Not necessarily audible, but we're hearing it's our time to pursue this or pursue that.

Now you can debate about the call, but I'll tell you this, if you're a genuine Christian, Christ has graced you with a certain measure of a gift. Has He called you to do that? You better believe it. That is His will that you use that.

You see, if you don't, you know what you're like? You're like the guy who buried it in the sand. Does He expect you to use it? You better believe He expects you to use it. Listen, what this tells us is this, Christ has designed us to fit in the body in a perfect place.

He's got something He wants each one of us to do. I mean, in the absolute sense, we don't just waltz into the church and do what we want to do. There's something that you've been designed to do.

And the truth is that our church will never be more healthy than when each one of us is pouring ourselves into doing exactly what Christ has graced us and equipped us according to His specific measure for each

one of us. Whatever desire a man may have. And listen, we can sometimes desire to do things that we're not gifted to do.

Sometimes our desires do not align with what we've been graced to do. That happens. Whatever subjective experiences a man may encounter, we can be sure of this, Christ must give grace to do something to each one of us if we're called by Him to do that thing.

If He's purposed us to do something in the church, be sure of this, He's graced us to do it. So, we don't make people pastors. We don't make somebody generous or merciful or an evangelist.

What we do as a church is we simply identify what Christ has done. And the reality is this, those gifts are powerful. They are supernatural enablements of you to impact the life of this church for the common good.

And if you've got that gift, it will powerfully demonstrate itself. You cannot hide it. It will come out.

Now some practical conclusions. And I don't want to say just by way of closing because my practical conclusions are half my sermon. But just hang with me because these are practical.

We like practical things, right? Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. You know what this does? It allows for no passive members. Now, if you were just distracted by something, listen to me again.

Everyone has been graced. This allows for no passive members. There is far too much.

You know what? When we go into these different countries and people immediately are paralyzed by what? Plant a church? We don't have a pastor. You know what often is behind that thinking? This one-man ministry concept. Or even in some churches, we believe in a plurality of elders.

Okay, but basically what happens is there's this mindset that most of us are passive. We float in here on Sundays. We passively sit.

We listen. And then we go out. Oh, somebody needs to be visited in the hospital? Well, the elders are going to do that.

Somebody needs to be evangelized? Well, the elders are going to do that. You know how often sin pops up in the church instead of somebody taking Matthew 18 and doing what it says to come to the pastors? You know, they're sitting over there. Well, you're doing Matthew 18? Oh, you're the pastor.

You're supposed to do this. Well, they don't actually say that, but that's why they came. It's like this mindset of a one-man show mentality.

And I'll tell you, it pervades. Now I know you all haven't been taught that way, so it's much less pervasive here than in many other places. But across America and across the world, that is so typical.

Such a typical idea of what the church is all about. And I'll tell you what, that is a fundamental denial of the reality that is being given to us in Ephesians 4-7. That every single one of you have a grace for the common good of this church.

You're all parts of the body and all have a Christ-given function for the common good of us all. And to the degree, to the extent, that you do not utilize your gift, we as a body suffer. You know what vestigial

means? They like to say that the appendix or the tailbone is a vestigial member.

Do you know what that means? Useless. Basically, we've evolved from apes and it's just kind of a tail is left. The appendix doesn't do anything.

All that means is we don't know what it does. The same Christ who designed the body designed the church. There are no vestigial organs.

You cannot be a part of this body and say, well, I'm just vestigial. I'm basically this passive member of the body. I don't have any function.

Nuh-uh. Nuh-uh. You can't do that with this verse.

Not when you read what it says. Each one of us. You all catch that, right? Each one of us.

The whole secret of the working of the human body is healthy people. Well, every part is working right. It's when a cancer comes in and things aren't working right.

It's when body parts start to shut down. Suddenly, the body is not healthy. There's nothing more healthy than everybody using that gift which they're graced with.

Brethren, we all have a particular function in this body and you're essential. And again, this is the argument of 1 Corinthians 12 that you can't say even to the lesser parts of the body that they're not needed because they are needed. Brethren, I've noticed this.

I've noticed that over the last three or four weeks, our prayer meetings have not been filled like they have at other times. Like they have been for the better part of 20 years. Somewhere in that, I suspect that somebody's thinking this.

It doesn't really matter if I'm there. Somebody's thinking that. Now look, I know, there's been a lot of sickness.

I understand that. Holidays, people traveling, I understand that. But based on the numbers I've seen lately, I have a feeling that some are not coming for other reasons.

And listen, if you get to the place where it's okay, the church won't miss me if I'm not there. You are dead wrong. And you're denying this passage.

Because you know what you're doing? What you have, you can say, well, I don't have the gift that so-and-so has. That doesn't matter. Still, what you've been given is for the common good of this body.

And guess what happens when you're not here? You're not able to use that gift for the common good. And that's really selfish. Let's say it what it is.

Have you been given, listen, Christian, have you been given grace? Are you one of the every one of us? You say yes. Well then, you have a measure that's been allotted to you. And guess what happens when you decide, I'm not going to be in the meeting.

For one thing, you're doing what the author of Hebrews tells you not to do. Not to forsake the assembling together. He said, well, I'm here on Sunday.

That's not what it says. It doesn't say, don't forsake the Sunday meeting. It says, don't forsake the meetings.

Don't forsake the gathering together of yourselves. Guess what, we gather together on Wednesdays. For something that's really important.

Oh, they don't need me. Have you been given what you've been given for the common good? Then we need you. We do need you.

You're important. You're a part of the body. And we're incomplete when you're not here.

That's just the reality. How can I know what gift Christ has measured to me? Well, I think this, if you start by asking what your spiritual gifts are, and then you lick your finger and hold it up to turn, what you're going to hear is crickets chirping. Asking yourself and going and looking in the mirror is really not the way.

A spiritual gift is a supernatural enablement that Christ gives to you that is for the common good. What does that mean? Common good. It means He has given you a spiritual gift to do good for other people.

I mean, that's the reality. What's common good? Equipping others for ministry. I mean, you see that.

He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. For what? Equipping people for the work of a ministry. To build up the body.

You know what? When you build up other people, that's common good. It's strengthening other people's faith. It's strengthening other people's love.

Why are you not supposed to miss the assembling of ourselves together? Because you're supposed to be there to stir up one another to love and good works. Encouraging, comforting, rebuking. These are the things.

Promoting worship. Promoting prayer. That's what happens when you come to the prayer meeting.

You get opportunities to talk to people. Giving to needs. People are discouraged.

People get cast down. We need each other. That's the way the church is designed.

These spiritual gifts transmit grace to others. Like love, and faith, and hope, and joy, and courage, and boldness, and longing for purity, patience. Gifts are for strengthening others.

They're for helping others. Brethren, don't live selfish, self-serving lives. We gather together as a church, not primarily to get.

Yes, we will get. But love is to give. And loving the brethren means, well, I'm just going to do what I want to do, on Wednesdays, or Sundays, or whenever, when grace groups meet.

We need each other. Because of this, Christ is giving you something that He knows is for my good. And when you're not there, we're all robbed of it.

It's taken away. Common good. The thing to do is not so much try to identify all your spiritual gifts.

The thing to do is look for needy people, hurting people, people whose faith is tottering, people who need encouragement. There are people who need rebukes. People need comfort.

Weeping with those who weep. Laughing with those who laugh. Giving to needs.

Encouraging other people's faith. Praying for one another. It's all about helping others and strengthening others.

So look for needs and look for needy people. And help the best you know how. If you have a gift, guess what? Grace is going to flow through you.

Others are going to realize it. If most people have no idea what your gift is, that is a bad, bad shadow cast on you. Because you know what it means? You're not active enough in this church for people to know.

I miss Wednesdays. I come in here on Sundays and sit far away off in a corner and get out of here as fast as I can. That's not right.

The way that you're going to use your gifts is by seeking out needs and seeking to answer those needs. You have to recognize it. The very fact of grace being given to each one of us means that Christ has gifted us to give.

Now, there are things beyond our control and things within our control. You say, what do you mean by that? I mean, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Christ is actively doing something that only He can do, that we can't do.

That's out of our power. That's out of our realm of ability to change. Christ measures out what we get and you can't change that.

There's only certain things that He has equipped you to do and there are certain things He has not equipped you to do. The whole idea is that He measures different measures to each of us. Remember, varieties of gifts, varieties of service or varieties of ministry, and varieties of energy or ability, workings.

You can't change this. Remember, it's like a man who goes on a far journey and what does he do? He gives five talents to them, two talents to him, and one talent to that guy. You can't change that.

That's what He does. He distributes according to His sovereign will. There's no changing that.

That's His business. It's not yours. Now, that's important because many are not content with their gifts.

Why? There's good reasons and there's bad reasons. And we could go far into that, but I'll tell you this, there can be a good reason. I look, there's needs.

I wish I could answer that. I mean, there can be reasons that spring from love as to why you want greater gifts. But then there can also be reasons that have to do with pride.

And there's just a reality. We see people in the church, and some are really gifted at doing certain things. We see extraordinary gifts of compassion or mercy or evangelism or preaching.

What we don't want to do is pine away in despair because we're discontent with what's been given to us. It's okay to want to be able to help. And you should try to help.

And you know what will happen, God will pour as much grace through you as you seek to help as what He's allotted to you. And that's good. Pour yourself out that way.

But don't spend all your time just trying to be something that you're not. Disappointed, discouraged. I mean, if you look at verse 7, this is by design.

If you don't have a speaking gift like somebody else, the way the world out there is wired, well, if you can't do that, you're a failure. That's not the case in the church. If you can't do that, that's not failure.

You say, well, I can't preach like so-and-so. That's not failure. That means that you've just been gifted to do something else.

So don't view it from that failure standpoint. If you don't have a gift of admonition or a gift of leadership, then know this, God has designed you for something else. So, what is in our control? That's not in our control, but what is within our control? And you know this, what's in our control is how well you use what's been given to you.

Now, you may remember, there's a parable given in Scripture. It's given in Luke 19. You don't need to turn there, but just listen to it.

You have this nobleman and he calls ten servants to himself. And he gives each one of the ten one, in some of your Bibles, it's called up. Is that the parable of the pounds? Yes, it's called pounds.

In our ESVs, it's called minas. I don't know what a mina is. I don't really know what a pound is, but not as they meant it.

But it's an allocation. That's all you really need to know. But here's what's interesting.

Ten people, each given one mina. One pound. One measure is allocated to each one.

And here's the thing. He tells them, engage in business until I come. When he returned, having received the kingdom, he ordered these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by doing business.

The first came before him saying, Lord, your mina has made ten minas more. That's a thousand percent increase. He goes to another guy.

His one mina made five more. Five hundred percent increase. Notice they started with the same amount.

One was twice as faithful as another. And guess what? One guy got it. In one of the parables it says he buried it in the sand.

In this one it says he hid it in a handkerchief. Do you know what happens if you don't come on Wednesdays? You don't go to grace groups. You're not interacting with people in the church during the week trying to help and promote the health of the church and give according to your gift during the week.

Maybe you come on Sundays and you're one of these passive people. You sit far away and you get out as quick as you can. Guess what's happening? I was going to say if you're saved.

If you're saved, you're not healthy. And what you have to admit is that if you compare your life to this parable, the one who buried his gift, the one who hid it in the handkerchief, isn't just called a Christian who

just isn't going to get as many rewards. Do you know what he's called? You wicked servant.

You say, how could I have anything to give with if I'm not really saved? Because then He hasn't graced me. That's missing the point. There are people in here that are professing to be Christian and the whole point is this, don't bury it.

Don't bury it. That's in our control. It's within our control to be faithful with the grace that's been measured out to us.

And what you need to recognize is this, a guy can have a gift comparable to Spurgeon's and somebody else has just a tiny gift. She lives at the end of an alley. She's poor.

But she seeks to use that little gift and she is so determined and she's diligent. A guy with Spurgeon-esque gift over here is sloppy with it. Spends too much time on the golf course, too much time in front of the TV.

Doesn't take this thing as serious as he ought. He is so gifted, it comes naturally. But he is not faithful with it.

This other woman over here, she's unknown. She's virtually unknown. She's an appendix.

Many of the people in the church don't even know what she does or what her usefulness is. But she's there in her little hovel somewhere and she prays for the church all the time and she prays for every single individual. Not a lot of fanfare.

Doesn't stand in a pulpit. Doesn't get put on the Internet. But she has brought forth a thousandfold.

And I'll tell you what, when Jesus comes back and that accounting is laid out, that's the one you want to be. And it doesn't matter how much you started with. And if you just sit there and all you do is complain, oh, I didn't get a gift like them! And you pine away.

I can't do anything, so I'm not going to do anything. You just bury it. I mean, if you're going to be faithful, obviously that means not burying it.

And what does it mean to not bury it? Obviously, it means getting involved in people's lives. Seeking to help where there's needs. The last thing I want to say is this about gifts.

You can stir gifts up. Now, it may be true that you only got a certain amount. Let me tell you this, Scripture says, for this reason I remind you, this is Paul speaking to Timothy, fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of hands.

This is a picture of fire. Fan into flame. Literally.

Listen, we've all been camping. We've been around a bonfire somewhere. You know what happens.

This is a picture of a fire that begins to go low. I grew up with a fireplace. I grew up camping.

We all know a fire... Listen, somebody comes along to a fire and pours a cold bucket of water on it, yeah, that is bad for a fire. And we know that the devil, he labors to quench all that is of God that's in us. But I'll tell you, there's another way to let a fire go out.

Just don't do anything. Just ignore it. Just don't tend to it.

Think about it. You've got a fire. What does it need? Typically, I grew up with a fireplace and we had a shovel.

We had a poker. We had a brush. What were those things for? Well, get the ashes out.

Stir it around. I mean, it's like what Christ has done is He's given you this burning hot coal. It's for us to make the fire rage.

You've seen the fire where there's embers down there? Yeah, there's heat. There's energy. But there is a place to fan it.

There's a place to blow on it. We had bellows. You could blow on it, but for some reason, somebody gave us bellows.

You get air on there. You need kindling. You know what you want to do with that coal? You want to go around? You know where the kindling is? It's found in people.

Go around and touch it on people. Go try to be a help to people. Go try to be an encouragement to people.

Go serve people. Give to people. Pray for people.

Try to use whatever it is in your capacity to build up other people, to strengthen other people, to help the health of our church, to make people more Christ-like, to encourage people in their worship, to encourage people's faith, to stir up one another's love. Go do that. To try to stir up people's passion for missions or try to stir up people's passion for souls through evangelism.

Do those things. Touch people with that ember that you have. See if it won't ignite.

I mean, sometimes when a fire's going down, what it needs is, you know, you've got pieces of the log that are outside the fire that if you just kicked them over into the fire, the thing would stir up. Is the fire going out? Well, stir it around. Change some things.

Make some effort here. Blow on it. Get rid of the ashes.

I mean, that's why we have the shovel. You've let the ashes build up too high. Get them out.

Leave it where it's just the hot coals and the logs that are on fire. Take away the things that tend to put the fire out, that tend to cause this thing to dampen down and diminish in light and heat. Get rid of it.

Listen, you want to exercise gifts? Be where God's people are. Be in the prayer meeting. Be in the small groups.

Be in each other's lives throughout the week. Brethren, one of the things you don't want to do is say, well, we go to church on Wednesday. We go to church on Sunday.

That's not the life of the church. That's not the life of the church that you'll find in the book of Acts. We want the life of the church that's found in Scripture.

Not traditional Christianity in the United States. If you have a gift, there's no reason that you only should be using the gift on Wednesday and Sunday. You need to be using that gift all through the week in whatever way possible.

I know you work, school, all these things. We all have to take those. Every one of us has to sort this out.

But you want to know one of the ways to get the fire burning and to fan into flame the gift that you have is to get out there and seek to use it. It's kind of like a lawnmower. You ever notice if you don't use your lawnmower, then when you finally want to go use it, it doesn't start? One of the best ways to keep your lawnmower operating is to keep using it.

Same with cars. We tend to use our cars all the time, so we don't really think about it. But just let a car sit for too long.

You're going to come back, probably the same thing will happen. It won't start. The more you use them, the more it keeps them usable.

Be intentional. Listen, this grace is real that Christ has given to you. Don't despise that.

Say, if Christ has given me a grace, well, then I'm going to use it. And I'm going to fan it into flame as much as I possibly can. And look, you only get to live once.

Why in the world if some 30-fold, some 60-fold, some 100-fold, why are you going to settle for 30-fold? Oh, because I want to watch the TV. I want to watch that show. Okay.

I mean, we all have to make decisions. And I'm not saying there's not a time to relax. There's not a time that we need some R&R.

There's not a time to get to the mountain and get away. I recognize there's a need for that. But brethren, if such things exist in Scripture that some are 30-fold and some are 100-fold, why would you not press to be 100-fold? We only get to live once.

Our works follow us, Scripture says. Why settle for minimal realities with regards to this usefulness? Christ has given you something. Use it.

Be faithful. Be faithful. Don't grow weary in well-doing.

You only get to live once. And we don't have a whole lot longer to go. Here we're at another year, another mile marker.

You don't have centuries and centuries to live. And even if you did, you shouldn't be squandering the time. Your time is going fast.

You only have one life to live. And if you're a Christian, you've been given a grace. And you're expected to use it.

Common good. And when you don't, you damage all of us. It's a very selfish thing when you don't do it.

I know some are shy, some are uncomfortable, some are socially backward. So what? Even if you're socially backward, you could pray for this church. You can pray.

You can pray. I mean, some have a gift of faith that causes them to lay hold on God and pray all the more. I don't know what your gift is.

Some can give and it's not really in the limelight at all. It's all done very secretly. But whatever your gift is, pour yourself into it.

Pour yourself out for one another. Grace is given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Use it, brethren.

Use it to equip this church. Use it to build up this church. Use it for the common good of this church.

Father, I pray You'd help us as we launch out into this new year. Make us ever more fruitful. Lord, give us many who on that day will shine, Lord, like the sun in the very firmament in the kingdom of our Father, who will have born a hundredfold.

Give us many like that. Hundredfold Christians. Lord, please don't let this American life, don't let the riches, don't let the comforts, don't let the wealth make us all into tenfold Christians when hundredfold could be a reality.

Oh, we would have rather been born in India if that's what this culture will do to us. Help us, Lord. Help us with all of our riches to be rich in good works towards the poor across this world.

I pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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