

Using Your Gifts
Eph 4:1-16
SS Lesson for 11/02/2008

Devotional Scripture: 1 Cor 12:4-20

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson outline came from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator with the details coming from a previous lesson - 07/16/2000. The lesson examines **Spiritual Gifts**. The **study's aim** is to study the walk of Christians, seven required unities, imparted gifts and gifted leaders, and how to edify (build up) the whole body of Christ - the Church. The **study's application** is to strive for the Spirit-led unity and maturity of the Church.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

If you consult the telephone directory for any larger city, you will find a bewildering array of churches. Why are there so many? On the one hand, the answer to this is very complicated and involves understanding the historical origins for every different church. On the other hand, these historical answers usually have a simple, common thread: established churches divide when they cannot agree over issues such as control, organization, or doctrine. Over the centuries, these divisions are multiplied and perpetuated until it becomes difficult even to estimate how many different varieties of churches there are. Today, we seem to accept the divided church as a given. While there are signs that this attitude is being challenged, we still are far from presenting the church of our Lord Jesus Christ as a united body to an unbelieving world. It does not have to be this way. On the night he was betrayed, Christ prayed for the unity of the church so that the world would believe the church's message about salvation in him (John 17:21). Similarly, the lesson this week is a strong testimony to the apostle Paul's belief in a united church. The biggest challenge of Paul's day was from those who wanted to make or continue to promote certain distinctions between Jew and Gentile within the church. While our reasons may be different, the principles given by Paul are still of great value in freeing ourselves from the divided church mentality that is so pervasive today. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon form a group of Paul's letters known as the Prison Epistles. These letters are so called because each mentions Paul's being held prisoner or in chains (example: Ephesians 3:1; 4:1). We believe that Paul wrote these letters while awaiting his trial in Rome during the period ad 61–63. All are quite useful for the church today, since Paul takes up issues of a timeless nature. Times have changed, but people haven't, so we are able to find much in these letters that feels like they have been written precisely for the benefit of the twenty-first-century church. As with many of Paul's letters, Ephesians follows the format of opening with a presentation of doctrinal teaching, followed by application of that teaching in the life of the individual and the church. In Ephesians, this shift takes place at the beginning of chapter 4. In the first three chapters of this letter, Paul discusses the church's foundation in the plan of God (Ephesians 1:11, 12); Paul explains Christ's role in breaking down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14); and he calls his readers to recognize that Christ is the head of his church, and the church is his body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). These points are all at odds with a divided church. Therefore, chapter 4 begins Paul's expression of the vital, unitary nature of the church.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Unlike other epistles penned by Paul, Ephesians is more general in tone. Because of the absence of specific congregational problems and personal greetings, many believe that Ephesians was intended as a circular letter. It seems that at some point it was sent to the church at Ephesus and was also circulated among other Christians in the region. While Paul ministered in Ephesus, "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). By the time Revelation was written, there were at least seven churches in Asia (1:11), a Roman province in what is today western Turkey. Paul wrote Ephesians from the Roman imprisonment alluded to in Acts 28. The first three chapters of Ephesians contain many important doctrinal affirmations. Beginning in Ephesians 4, Paul turned from doctrinal to more practical matters. Our lesson text is taken from this practical application section. It deals with the unity in the Spirit that believers should have, but it also shows how individual differences can operate within that unity. The church is not so much an organization as it is an organism, with Christ as its Head and believers as functioning members of His body. What do we think of when we evaluate a church? Too often we look only at the building, landscaping, parking lot, design, equipment, programs, and other outward features. We may wonder what social class of people attend and whether or not they are materially blessed. This must grieve the Lord, for He is most concerned about spiritual development within believers. They should be becoming more and more Christlike. We need to periodically remind ourselves that Christian maturity is our goal: otherwise, we will wind up joining the trend to be increasingly worldly minded.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Spiritual Unity (4:1-6)

- 1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.
- 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- 4 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--
- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Living a Life Worthy of the Calling (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

To be called is to be invited to an event or task. As Christians we have been invited to live our lives according to the standards of God, and we have accepted this invitation with all our hearts. We may have many jobs and various careers over a lifetime, but Christians have a single calling: to live with and for Christ (see Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:6). This life walk extends to work, play, family, school, and entertainment—to whatever we do. We do not walk in a worthy manner when we dishonor the name of Christ and betray the trust he has put in us. When we walk/live for ourselves alone, we do so as enemies of Christ (see Philippians 3:18). *[emphasis mine - jrh]*

Essential attitudes (vs 1-3)

Humbleness

Because I am one of God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Because I want to have godly wisdom (James 3:13)

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

Because I will be blessed (Matt 5:3)

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Because I need to be more like Jesus (Matt 11:29)

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Gentleness

Commentary on gentleness "Unnecessary Gentleness" (From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

One of Bud Blake's Tiger comic strips shows a group of children playing football. One little boy stands and watches as a girl carries the football right past him. When he is asked why he didn't tackle her, he replies, "I was afraid I would hurt her." Later, on his way home, he is complaining about what happened to him. He says, "I got thrown out for unnecessary gentleness." In certain sports a player is sometimes thrown out for unnecessary roughness, but never for unnecessary gentleness! In the life and work of the church, we must learn to be gentle. We must follow Paul's admonition to "be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). Roughness is always unnecessary in the church. Love is to be the trademark that identifies followers of Jesus (John 13:35). Love demands courtesy and kindness. Love demands that we learn how to disagree without being disagreeable. Love desires to handle both the sinning believer (Galatians 6:1) and the one who requires further instruction (2 Timothy 2:24, 25) gently. If we exercise gentleness, we can keep the unity of the church intact. If we fail to be gentle—if we use "unnecessary roughness" with others—we risk dividing the body of Christ. Even the soldiers who crucified Jesus would not divide the robe of Christ. Let us not be guilty of dividing the body of Christ.

Patience

Because I have an inheritance in the kingdom (Col 1:11-12)

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Because I have biblical examples (James 5:10-11)

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. 11 As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Tolerance

Because God is tolerant with me (Col 3:13)

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Because I should not try to please myself (Rom 15:1)

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Because love is always tolerant (1 Cor 13:7)

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Because I need to fulfill the command of God (Gal 6:2)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Seven essential principles of unity (vs 4-6)

One Body (Rom 12:5)

so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

One Spirit (1 Cor 12:4)

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

One Hope

A hope into which I am called (Eph 1:18)

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

A hope whose goal is the salvation of my soul (1 Pet 1:3, 9)

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 9 receiving the end of your faith-- the salvation of your souls.

One Lord (Rom 14:8-9)

8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. 9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

One Faith (Gal 5:6)

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

One Baptism (1 Pet 3:18-21)

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also-- not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

One God

Because there is no other God (Isa 45:5-6)

5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, 6 so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

Because God is One (Mark 12:28-30)

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism and one God (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

One Lord in this context is Jesus, the one we serve as the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22). Logically, then, there is only one faith, because Paul is speaking of faith in the Son of God (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 4:13). There is only one faith because there is only one Son of God, the Lord Jesus. Further, there is only one baptism: baptism into Christ. According to Paul, "all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27). There can be only one baptism because there is only one Christ. With this understanding, Paul ties baptism to full identification with Christ. That there is only one God is the cornerstone of Jewish faith (Deuteronomy 6:4). This has not changed with the advent of Jesus as the Son of God. Christians believe there is only one God. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not a denial of the oneness of God. Paul uses marvelous imagery to describe the complete oneness of God. God is the Father of all, the source and creator of all things. There exists nothing made by a rival god, because there is no rival creator. Paul then uses three prepositional phrases to describe God's presence everywhere: over all, through all, and in all. This is not a statement that "everything is God." Rather, it summarizes Paul's belief that God is universally present and influential in everything we do.

Spiritual Diversity (4:7-12)

7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.
8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men."
9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?)
10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)
11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,
12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

Source of our gifts (vs 7-10)

Bestowed by Jesus (from Barnes' Notes)

Grace is bestowed upon all true Christians, and all have enough to enable them to live a life of holiness. Yet we are taught here: (1) That it is a "gift." It is "bestowed" on us. It is not what is originated by ourselves. (2) it is by a certain "measure." It is not unlimited, and without rule. There is a wise adaptation; an imparting it by a certain rule. The same grace is not given to all, but to all is given enough to enable them to live as they ought to live. (3) that measure is the gift of Christ, or what is given in Christ. It comes through him. It is what he has purchased; what he has obtained by his merits. All have enough for the purposes for which God has called them into his kingdom, but there are not the same endowments conferred on all. Some have grace given them to qualify them for the ministry; some to be apostles; some to be martyrs; some to make them eminent as public benefactors. All this has been obtained by Christ; and one Should not complain that another has more distinguished endowments than he has.

The Holy Spirit gives as He determines (1 Cor 12:11)

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

God gives all good and perfect gifts (James 1:17)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Variety of our gifts (vs 11)

Different gifts according to God's grace (Rom 12:6)

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us.

Different gifts for the common good (1 Cor 12:5-7)

5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Different gifts to serve others (1 Pet 4:10)

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Leaders of the Church (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)

We should remember that the theme of this section is the God-ordained unity of the church. If we keep this in mind, we can see that the emphasis here is not upon giving special endowments to individuals, but more upon providing certain categories of leaders for the work of the church as a whole. Christ providentially supplies apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the ongoing ministry of his body, the church.

Apostle is a word implying "one sent out with authority to do a certain task." The New Testament seems to limit this term to those commissioned by Jesus personally. This includes the original 12 disciples (see Luke 6:13) and a very few others (Acts 14:14). It is unlikely that every first-century church has an apostle, indicating that Paul has the larger church in mind at this point.

Prophets are those who are given a special word from God to communicate to the church. An example in Acts is Agabus (Acts 11:27, 28; 21:10). Whether or not Christ still provides prophets to his church is a matter of some controversy today. We can see, however, that the ministry of prophets became less important as the Word of God became available as the written New Testament.

Evangelists are those who proclaim the gospel message through preaching. Timothy is known as an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5) as is Philip (Acts 21:8). This may take several forms in today's church. One example of an evangelist is the modern "church planter," who seeks to evangelize a community by establishing a new church.

Some students see the last two designations on Paul's list as separate functions; others think that Paul is referring to a single function of "*pastor-teacher*." A pastor is a shepherd who tends to the needs of the flock. In the first-century church, the word elder is used interchangeably with the words shepherd and overseer (see Acts 20:17-28; similarly 1 Peter 5:1, 2). This office of the church provides the stability of oversight, bolstered by strong teaching. It is important for Paul that each church has elders (see Acts 14:23).

Purpose of our gifts (vs 12)

Equipping saints for service

Through teaching (Heb 6:1-2)

1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Through a faithful servant attitude (1 Cor 4:1-2)

1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Through God's preparation (Eph 2:10)

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Through God working in saints (Heb 13:20-21)

20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Through other's prayers and God's power to live a worthy life (Col 1:9-12)

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Building up the body of saints

By making the effort (Rom 14:19)

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

By only doing things for others that are strengthening to them (Rom 15:2)

Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

By exercising God's gifts for the benefit of others (1 Cor 14:12)

So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

By working through the Church for kingdom building (1 Cor 14:26)

What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

By encouragement to others (1Thes 5:11)

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Spiritual Maturity (4:13-16)

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The process (vs 13-14)

Common faith

Through God's purification (Zeph 3:9)

"Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder.

Through Jesus' intercession (John 17:20-21)

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Through being of one mind with the saints (Acts 4:32)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Through being united with Jesus (Phil 2:1-2)

1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Growth in the knowledge of God and Jesus

By the choice of God (Matt 11:27)

"All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

By knowing God through Jesus (John 17:3)

Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

By Jesus' continuing making Himself known (John 17:25-26)

25 "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

By growth in encouragement and love (Col 2:2)

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

By God divine power (2 Pet 1:3)

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

By Jesus giving the understanding (1 Jn 5:20)

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true-- even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Seeking the fullness of Christ

Commentary from Barnes' Notes

The phrase "the measure of the fulness," means, probably, the "full measure"-- by a form of construction that is common in the Hebrew writings, where two nouns are so used that one is to be rendered as an adjective-- "as trees of greatness"-- meaning great trees. Here it means, that they should so advance in piety and knowledge as to become wholly like him.

Commentary from Wycliffe Commentary

Are united to one another. Unto a perfect man. A reference not to the individual believer but to the composite man; that is, the body of which Christ is the Head.

Commentary from Adam Clarke Commentary

The full measure of knowledge, love, and holiness, which the Gospel of Christ requires. Many preachers, and multitudes of professing people, are studious to find out how many imperfections and infidelities, and how much inward sinfulness, is consistent with a safe state in religion: but how few, very few, are bringing out the fair Gospel standard to try the height of the members of the church; whether they be fit for the heavenly army; whether their stature be such as qualifies them for the ranks of the Church militant! The measure of the stature of the fullness is seldom seen; the measure of the stature of littleness, dwarfishness, and emptiness, is often exhibited.

Being steadfast

By giving myself fully to the work of God (1 Cor 15:58)

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

By focusing only on God's righteous word (1 Cor 14:20)

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.

By constantly using God's word to train myself (Heb 5:13-14)

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

By God's power to make me strong (1 Pet 5:10)

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

The product (vs 15-16)

Speaking the truth

By acting and speaking out of love (1 Jn 3:18)

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

By having no deceit in my spirit (Ps 32:2)

Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

By not being a stumbling block (Rom 14:15)

If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.

Loving one another

By obedience to God (1 Pet 1:22)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

By being patient, kind and humble (1 Cor 13:4)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

By eagerly desiring and practicing God's gifts (1 Cor 14:1)

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

By displaying the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Working together

Because two are better than one (Eccl 4:9)

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work:

So that saints can rejoice together (John 4:36)

Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

Because we can help each other (Prov 27:17)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.

Because God has placed each one where He wants them (1 Cor 12:18)

But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

By showing hospitality (3 Jn 1:8)

We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

This may be a discouraging lesson for some who serve a church that is wracked with strife or for those who have been victims of church warfare in the past. The key to overcoming this problem is “speaking the truth in love.” Many cantankerous church people are ready and willing to speak their understanding of the truth, not allowing for differences of opinion on relatively unimportant matters. They have the “truth” part, but not the “love” part. On the other hand, there are those who want to avoid conflict at all cost and just love everyone 24/7. For them, “love” means never correcting a misguided or misinformed brother or sister. Would you rather be in a church that has truth but no love or a church having love but no regard for truth? We shouldn’t have to make this choice. Unity comes through good teaching of correct doctrine, done without arrogance or disrespect. Unity comes when the love of Christ is shared and practiced by every member.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Grace has often been described as "God's Riches At Christ's Expense." There is certainly a lot of truth to that, for grace is really the act of God pouring out wonderful blessings on His people. As our lesson text points out, grace involves Christ. What was Paul really getting at here in the text? Was he merely making conversation, or was he showing off his considerable theological knowledge? Neither of these possibilities is the case. Paul was a prisoner at the time he wrote this epistle (Eph. 4:1). That incarceration followed a trip to Rome, and we see the place he was writing from in Acts 28:16, 23, 30-31. Yet even as a prisoner (most likely a form of house arrest), he stayed busy. He wrote three other epistles during this time (Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon being the others) that are included in our Bibles. He may have written others that never became part of the Bible. Paul never let anyone or anything stop him. He had endured much suffering for Christ (2 Cor. 11:23-27). In addition to all that Paul suffered at the hands of others, there was some other form of suffering, which he referred to as a "thorn in the flesh" (12:7), that three times he asked God to remove. God chose not to remove it; instead, He gave him His grace. God's specific answer was "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (vs. 9). For Paul to ask God not once but three times to change something he suffered from meant that it was a serious matter indeed. He was not one to complain. Yet he shared with the Corinthians that God gave him not what he had asked for but actually something far better: His grace. Now Paul told the Ephesians (and all Christians) that God gives His grace. Notice what he said about the amount. He did not say that God gives the amount of grace based on what we need. It would seem logical for Him to do, since those who suffer more need more grace—right? No. God gives the amount of grace "according to the measure of the gift of Christ." The wording in the original Greek helps us understand what Paul was saying. The phrase "the gift of Christ" takes on a certain meaning. It can simply mean "the gift that belongs to Christ," but it can also mean more. Paul was pointing out that the "measure" is according to what Christ gives. So just as it is with the final judgment (John 5:22), so Jesus is the one in control of the amount of grace we need. We need not fear that someone is getting more than we are. God is generous. Anyone who reads even a little of the Bible should know that. Also, by nature grace is abundant. Paul referred to this in another epistle: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). There were some who thought they could stir up more grace by sinning. That is wrong, of course, but they were right in thinking that grace is abundant. Christian, God loves you. Christ died for you. He will abundantly pour out His grace on you no matter what. He loves doing that. Will you receive His grace?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. A worthy walk is a walk of humility that puts others first (Eph. 4:1-2)
2. It is an offense to God to disrupt the unity He created for us as believers (vs. 3-6)
3. We need not fear being unable to serve Christ; He gives us the ability to serve (vs. 7)
4. Spiritual growth comes as we submit to those whom God places in spiritual authority (vs. 8-12)
5. Spiritual maturity is marked by stability in doctrinal matters (vs. 13-14)
6. Being part of a ministering church is key to our becoming like Christ (vs. 15-16)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Walking worthy of the calling (Eph. 4:1-3)

In I Corinthians 12, Paul explained the nature of spiritual gifts as coming from one source, the Lord, and having the basic purpose of serving and strengthening the body of Christ, the church. As he wrote to the Ephesians concerning spiritual gifts, he first emphasized the individual Christian's responsibility to recognize his high calling and to live in keeping with it. Such conduct was to have certain characteristics that would have as their end result the unity of the local church within the Holy Spirit. The believer was expected to be meek and gentle, showing patience with other believers in a genuine demonstration of Christian love.

One source (Eph. 4:4-6)

One reason the believer could strive for unity in the Spirit was because the source of the believer's calling and gifts was singular: God Himself. They all shared a common faith in Christ and a common source of baptism, namely, the Holy Spirit. Paul noted that every believer has a special relationship to God the Father. As God, He is not only Lord over the Christian; He also is the one who works in and through each of us. He lives within each believer.

Gifts to believers (Eph. 4:7-10)

God also gives to each believer particular spiritual gifts. These gifts are given on an individual basis. Although they are clearly identifiable, they are not identical from one believer to another. They are given, however, to be used within the body for the benefit of the church. Since the source of the gifts is Christ, the purpose of such gifts is for the benefit of the body of Christ.

Gifts for equipping the saints (Eph. 4:11-16)

Paul specified five gifts that have been given to enable the church to carry out its tasks. The first gifts mentioned are those of apostle and prophet. Upon the foundation of these rests the entire church as it is built up from Christ's advent until His return (cf. Eph. 2:20). Indeed, Christ Himself is the foundation, through the words of His inspired messengers—the prophets who foretold Him and the apostles who definitively set down His testimony for all time. The third gift is that of evangelists. They are chosen to carry out, with spiritual and practical skill, the outreach of the church to the lost. The fourth and fifth gifts appear to be joined into one, those of the pastor/ teacher. This gift is given for the benefit of individual churches, enabling them to be guided and fed from the Scriptures on a steady and consistent basis. Each of these gifts was given so that all the churches individually, and thus the church as a whole, could be equipped for ministry and nurtured for spiritual health and growth. The time between the beginning of the church and its consummation at Christ's return is a time within which individual Christians are to utilize their spiritual gifts to enable the church to discern truth from error and to grow to be like Christ. Every Christian has a specific place within the church and a specific role within which to function. When we carry out our responsibilities properly, we are like the various parts of a human body that enable it to function properly.