

Ephesians

Lesson Thirteen Maturity in the Church

4:7-16

Introduction:

1. Paul taught both the attitudes and the truth needed to gain and maintain unity in the Lord's church.
2. Building on that foundation of unity, he began to teach the Ephesians how to mature as children of God.
3. This must be the goal of every Christian – to grow in knowledge, faith and work in the body of Christ.

The Bible Doctrine of Spiritual Gifts

I. Miraculous Abilities

- A. Because this passage is in the context of the early church and deals with miraculous gifts, it is good to review the teaching of Scripture on this subject.
- B. The Apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4).
 1. This was for the purpose of inspiration (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:13).
 2. This was for the purpose of revelation (John 15:26-27; 16:7-8).
- C. This enabled them to impart miraculous powers to other believers (Acts 8:14-17).
 1. This was necessary for the establishment of the church throughout the world (Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11).
 2. They did not have the New Testament; for, it was still being revealed.
 3. Thus, they needed spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Hebrews 2:1-4).
- D. When the revelation of God's Word was complete, there would be no more need for miraculous abilities (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).
- E. In the conversion of the alien sinner, the Holy Spirit works through the Word of God (John 17:17; Romans 1:16; James 1:18; etc.).
- F. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian (non-miraculously, by the Word of God) brings blessings (Ephesians 1:3; 5:18; Colossians 3:16; Acts 3:19).

II. Modern Application

- A. Today, the church does not need or have miraculous powers.
- B. As the Christian studies passages dealing with spiritual gifts, he must learn the lesson of using his talents and abilities to serve and glorify God.
- C. While these talents are not "spiritual gifts," they are blessings from God over which one must be a good and faithful steward.

4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ

- A. The word "grace" refers to the spiritual gifts given by God to the Christians at Ephesus.
 1. This is not God's grace given in salvation; for, every child of God receives the same grace of forgiveness and redemption.

2. Instead, it refers to the imparting of spiritual gifts (cf. 3:7-8).
- B. These gifts of grace were given “according to the measure” of Christ.
 1. In other words, they were given to accomplish the purpose in the mind and will of the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:18; Hebrews 2:4).
 2. This means that everyone did not receive the same gift or ability.
 3. This was not a comment on their spiritual standing or level of faith.
 4. Instead, they were bestowed in a way that would best meet the need of the church and serve the purpose of the Lord.
- C. These gifts were given by Jesus the Christ – through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).
 1. Notice, the “gift of Christ” is not Christ.
 2. Likewise, the “gift of the Holy Spirit” is not the Holy Spirit.

4:8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men

- A. To verify this teaching, Paul quotes from Psalm 68:18.
 1. This shows that the giving of miraculous abilities to men was prophesied by God through David.
 2. It also demonstrates that this would not happen until Jews was victorious over His enemies and ascended to the Father in Heaven.
- B. The picture painted by this passage is of a victory parade with the Lord bringing into captivity those enemies who had held man captive.
 1. Jesus conquered Satan (Mark 3:27; Luke 3:19; Col. 2:15; Job 42:10).
 2. Jesus conquered sin (Matthew 4:1ff; etc.).
 3. Jesus conquered death (Hebrews 2:14).
- C. When His triumphant procession returned to Heaven (Psalm 24:7-10), Jesus received His right to rule over His kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14) and He received gifts to give unto man.
- D. These gifts were given to those He liberated from the bondage of sin, by their obedience of the Gospel (cf. Acts 2:33, 38-39; 3:19).

4:9-10 (Now he that ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

- A. To prove further that this passage referred to Jesus, Paul made the point that one could not ascend unless he had first descended.
 1. The Jews who rejected Jesus (then and now) sought to apply this verse to God the Father.
 2. However, the Father did not ascend up on high – He has always been there!
 3. However, Jesus could ascend to Heaven because He had willingly and sacrificially chosen to descend to the earth.
- B. The “lower parts of the earth” is probably a reference to earth itself (Psa. 139:15).
 1. The context seems to be contrasting His incarnation with His ascension (cf. John 3:13).
 2. The “lower parts” of Jesus’ time on earth may refer to His humility as a servant and His humiliation at the cross (cf. Philippians 2:6-8).
 3. However, it may indicate the descent of His soul into Hades while His body was in the grave (Matt. 12:40; Acts 2:27; Romans 10:7).
- C. Afterward, He ascended above all to fill all with blessings and spiritual gifts.

4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers

- A. After reminding the Ephesians that their miraculous abilities were given by the Lord, Paul identified several of those gifts.
- B. **APOSTLES**
1. The word 'apostle' means, "One who is sent; a delegate, ambassador, messenger."
 2. It refers to one who is sent with the authority of another to deliver a message, usually including instructions to be followed.
 3. There were only 12 apostles of Jesus, plus Paul.
 4. In terms of rank, authority and function, the Apostles were first (2:20; 1 Corinthians 12:28).
 - a. They were empowered to deliver the Gospel (Acts 16:4; 1 Corinthians 14:37).
 - b. They were ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20; cf. Matt. 19:28).
 5. Obviously, miracles were involved in their work – from inspiration to confirmation.
- C. **PROPHETS**
1. The Greek word for 'prophet' (*prophetes* [προφητης]) is a compound of two words: *pro*, meaning "before" or "prior" and *phemi*, meaning "to speak."
 2. Thus, a prophet is one who speaks of something before it happens.
 3. However, this word came to be used for inspired teachers even when they were not foretelling future events.
 4. While New Testament prophets occasionally predicted the future, their primary work was assisting the apostles in inspired preaching and teaching.
 5. Cf. Acts 11:26-30; 13:1-3; 15:30-32; 21:10-14; 1 Corinthians 12:28-29; 14:29-40; Ephesians 2:20; 3:5
 6. Just as there are no apostles today; so, there are no modern prophets.
- D. **EVANGELISTS**
1. The Greek word for 'evangelize' means, "To announce good news."
 - a. It comes from two root words: *eu*, meaning "good" and *angelos*, meaning "messenger."
 - b. Thus, the Gospel is literally "the good message."
 2. An evangelist is one who announces good news or proclaims the Gospel.
 3. This specific word is used only three times in the NT (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). {The word for 'evangelize' is found 90 times.}
 4. The function of the evangelist was to preach, often with the aim of conversion.
 - a. In contrast, the function of the apostles was to govern – accomplished by preaching.
 - b. Thus, the evangelist might have the gift of inspired teaching, speaking in tongues, or working of miracles (to confirm the word).
 5. The evangelist was recognized by his work, not by an office or title.
 6. This does not mean that an evangelist only preaches to convert the lost or establish a congregation (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3; 3:14-15; 4:13; etc.).
- E. **PASTORS**
1. The word 'pastor' means, "Shepherd or herdsman."
 - a. It is used 18 times in the NT, always as "shepherd(s)" except in this verse.

- b. Foy E. Wallace wrote that the word *shepherd* “has [a] temporal basis,” whereas *pastor* “is a spiritual word.”
 - 2. The function of pastors was to oversee, tend, and feed the flock of God (cf. Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-3).
 - 3. The qualifications given for one to be selected as a pastor emphasize that this is a spiritual work, not an executive office (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)
 - 4. Thus, a pastor might have the gift of miraculous wisdom, discerning of spirits, or interpretation.
- F. **TEACHERS**
 - 1. It should be noted that pastors and teachers are joined together with the word “and.”
 - 2. This indicates that pastors must be teachers – this is essential to their tending and feeding the flock.
 - a. There were (and are) teachers who are not pastors.
 - b. However, elders were known to “labor in word and doctrine” (1 Tim. 5:17).
 - 3. A teacher is an instructor, one who helps others to learn.
 - 4. Naturally, teaching was a part of all the works mentioned in this verse.
 - 5. But, the focus of pastors and teachers is the edifying of the local congregation.
- G. These different works (and the miraculous abilities that accompanied them) were all necessary for the establishing and growing of the early church.
- H. Some of these works continue today, though not with the spiritual gifts.

4:12 For the perfecting of the saints

- A. Next, Paul emphasized the reason for these gifts in the early church.
- B. First, these gifts made possible the perfecting of the saints.
 - 1. The word for “perfecting” is used only here in the New Testament.
 - 2. It means, “Complete furnishing” or “equipping.”
- C. This does not mean that every Christian would practice sinless perfection.
- D. Instead, it refers to the complete furnishing of the members to become the body of Christ.
- E. The message proclaimed by these men would enable every Christian to know their duty and place in the Lord’s church.

For the work of the ministry

- A. Spiritual gifts were also for the work of the ministry.
- B. The word ‘ministry’ means, “Service; the carrying out of the commands of another.”
- C. In order to carry out the Lord’s commands for establishing the church, miraculous abilities were needed initially.
- D. This service was the founding and building of the church.

For the edifying of the body of Christ

- A. Spiritual gifts were also needed to edify the body of Christ.
- B. The word for “edifying” is an architectural term meaning, “To build up.”
- C. Miracles were needed to found and then to mature the Lord’s church.
- D. Remember, the miracles were always tied to the teaching of Truth.

4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ

- A. One must not underestimate the importance of the word “till.”
 - 1. While spiritual gifts served an important purpose in the early church, they were never intended to continue indefinitely.
 - 2. The Greek word for ‘till’ means, “As far as; up to a certain point; until.”
 - a. It comes from the root word for length.
 - b. Thus, it is used as “a preposition of extend [denoting the *terminus*].”
 - c. It is translated as “until” 7 times and as “till” 2 times. (Matthew 11:23; 13:30; 28:15; Mark 13:30; Acts 10:30; 20:7; Ephesians 4:13; 1 Timothy 6:14; Hebrews 9:10)
 - 3. Miraculous abilities were to continue until unity, knowledge and maturity were attained.
- B. The phrase “we all” refers to the whole church.
 - 1. Spiritual gifts were limited to specific individuals.
 - 2. The time would come when all would possess the same knowledge of truth – without miraculous aid.
- C. The word “come” means, “To arrive at; to attain” (cf. Acts 27:12; Phil. 3:11).
- D. “The unity of the faith” refers to the complete revelation of God’s truth.
 - 1. Note that the article “the” is used both with “unity” and “faith.”
 - 2. “The faith” refers to the “one faith” of verse 5.
 - 3. This is the Gospel system, revealed in the New Testament (cf. Acts 6:7; 13:8; 14:22; 16:5; 24:24; Romans 1:5; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Galatians 2:16, 20; Philippians 3:9; 1 Timothy 4:1; Jude 1:3).
 - 4. By this system of “one faith,” all men – Jews and Gentiles – could be united.
 - 5. But, for men to be united, the “one faith” had to be united – fully and completely revealed.
 - 6. Until the New Testament was completed, miraculous gifts would continue.
- E. “The knowledge of the Son of God” is information revealed to man by Jesus, through the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:4).
 - 1. This does not mean that man will know everything that the Lord knows.
 - 2. It does not refer to some kind of mystical knowledge of God.
 - 3. Instead, it refers to the knowledge revealed in the Gospel – the explanation of the mystery of salvation.
- F. The “perfect man” is the completed and mature body of Christ.
 - 1. The Greek word for ‘perfect’ means, “Finished, brought to its end; wanting nothing necessary to completeness; full grown, mature, of full age.”
 - 2. Thus, it does not refer to man’s achieving sinless perfection.
 - 3. Nor does it mean that the church will be without sin.
 - 4. Instead, it means that the church would be able to teach, work and function as God intended because of the revelation of truth (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8-12).
- G. By this revelation of truth, the church will be mature and will measure up to the stature of Jesus.
 - 1. Again, this does not mean that men possess sinless perfection.
 - a. On the human side, the church will always have flaws.
 - b. But, on the divine side, the church is perfect – exactly as God intended.
 - 2. The image is of a boy attaining manhood – the height of a man. *{Imagine a man’s head on a child’s body. The church must be the full grown body of Christ.}*

4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive

- A. The miraculous gifts in the early church resulted in the revelation and confirmation of God's Truth, causing the Lord's church to mature.
- B. As a result, they would "be no more children" – meaning, immature.
 - 1. The Greek word for 'children' literally means, "No words;" thus, "not speaking" or "one who cannot speak words."
 - 2. It is almost always used in a spiritual sense (Matthew 11:25; 21:16; Luke 10:21; Romans 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11; Galatians 4:1, 3; Hebrews 5:13).
- C. Without Truth, the spiritually immature are easily led astray by the errors of men.
 - 1. The picture is of a ship without a captain, rudder, or anchor.
 - 2. It is at the mercy of the wind and the waves – traveling with no direction, soon to be dashed upon the rocks or capsized and sunk.
- D. When it comes to matters of religion, there are those who seek to deceive.
 - 1. The Greek word for 'sleight' is *kubeia* [κυβεία], meaning, "Cube."
 - a. It was the word for a die, often used in gambling.
 - b. Gamblers are often cheaters, defrauding others of money.
 - c. Thus, this word refers to teachers who would cheat others of their souls by their false doctrines.
 - 2. "Cunning craftiness" refers to trickery or subtlety (cf. Luke 20:22-23; 1 Corinthians 3:19; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 11:3).
 - 3. To "lie in wait to deceive" means to plan and position one's self where deception of others will be possible.
 - a. It is literally a method (*travelling over*) of deception.
 - b. This word is used only one other time – of the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:11).
 - 4. Men will deceive with elaborate and convincing doctrines and errors.
- E. The lesson is that without a knowledge of God's revealed Truth, one will remain spiritually immature and in danger of being led astray from the "narrow way."
- F. This is a reiteration of Paul's earlier warning to the elders at Ephesus (Ac. 28:20).

4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ

- A. Instead of being deceived, the church is able to speak the truth.
 - 1. Initially, this was by spiritual gifts.
 - 2. Now, it is by the New Testament.
- B. Unlike the "cunning craftiness" or false teachers, Christians speak the truth in love.
 - 1. This involves love of the Truth – thus, it must not be added to, taken from, watered down, or altered in any way.
 - 2. This involves love of souls – thus, they must be warned and edified.
 - 3. This involves love of the church – thus, there is no room for compromise.
 - 4. This involves love of God.
- C. The result of speaking the truth in love is the maturing of individual Christians and of the church as a whole.
- D. The mature body will be governed and guided by the Head.

4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love

- A. The unity, growth and maturity of the body is dependent upon its attachment to the Head.
- B. The “whole body” is the church – individual Christians joined together as one congregation.
- C. It is “fitly joined together” like the framing of a building (cf. 2:21).
- D. It is “compacted” or knit together in unity and love (cf. Colossians 2:2, 19; Acts 9:22; 16:10).
 - 1. Keep in mind the often strained relationship between Jew and Gentile.
 - 2. Now, they are “one new man” and “one body” in Christ (2:14-17).
- E. This is accomplished by the Word of God; but, during the time of miracles, every joint (member) supplied truth as it was revealed.
 - 1. The application of this principle is that every member has a place, an ability, and a work in the Lord’s church.
 - 2. When every member fills his or her role and does his or her part – according to Truth – then, the church is united and edified.
- F. Yet, knowledge alone was not enough; work was also required.
 - 1. The spiritually gifted had to work in exercising their gifts.
 - 2. The truth that was revealed had to be preached and taught.
 - 3. Furthermore, those who learned the truth had to work to practice it.
 - 4. The obedience of every member was needed for unity and growth.
- G. *“The sum of the passage is that without the harmony of all parts the natural body cannot mature. The existence of all the parts is not enough. They must function. But their function must be in complete harmony. So of the spiritual body, its organization may be perfect, every part may be there, but if love does not pervade it, the parts cannot synchronize in spiritual function.”* (Foy E. Wallace, Jr.)