



# **Spiritual Gifts For Ministry**

By

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## Ministry Gifts – The Source

There is a lot of talk about ministry gifts these days — and I'm glad about that. Christians should be talking about everything God has given them to serve Him. And that is the key. God gives His children ministry gifts as He chooses.

Christians in the ancient city of Corinth during the first century A.D. had a lot of problems. Some of them were proud and arrogant. Many were involved in divisions that had weakened the church. Some were acting out their selfishness during times set aside for remembering the sacrifice of the Lord Who died for them. Some were openly involved in sexual sins. The Apostle Paul addressed their pride and arrogance and called them out for their selfishness and sin. He pointed to their carnality and ignorance and called them back to obedience to the Source of their spiritual life.

Before Paul exhorted them to change their behavior, he reminded them about who they were. Look at the first 7 verses of 1 Corinthians and you'll see Paul addressing them as the "church of God ... those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints." Paul greatly respected the work God had done in the lives of the Corinthian believers. God had saved them, made them a part of the Body of Christ, and set them apart for holy service (the meaning of the word "sanctified").

Paul then wrote that he thanked God *“always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.”* All Christians, even those at carnal Corinth, possess the grace of God given to them by Christ Jesus. The Greek word translated **grace** is *charis* and means “unearned and unmerited favor.” It comes from a root word that means “to rejoice, be glad.” God’s Grace is a gift. No one earns or merits it. God gives it freely to human beings as He wills. The Gift of Grace causes great rejoicing on the part of the people who receive it. Paul took the Corinthians back to the beginning, **to the Source**, of their faith – *“for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.”*

What does this gift of Grace do to people? It enriches their lives in every way – *“that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.”* The word enriched is a translation of the Greek word *ploutizo* and means “to make rich, wealthy.” The context is Christ giving the Corinthians “the grace of God.” Paul was telling the believers in Corinth that the amazing gift God had given them had made them spiritually wealthy – *“in all utterance and all knowledge.”* The Corinthians had many financial struggles in their lives, like the vast majority of people in the world then and now, but they were rich in spiritual things. Those things included *“all utterance and all knowledge.”* That was a huge clue to what Paul was going to address in his letter to the Corinthians: utterance and knowledge.

The word **utterance** is the Greek word *logos* and means “word.” It deals with the area of speech, what is uttered. The word **knowledge** is the Greek word *gnosis* and means “a seeking to know, an investigation to gain knowledge.” The word also contained the idea of complete understanding that came from the acquiring of knowledge. Paul was writing in the context of spiritual knowledge. Many of the Christians in Corinth believed they had acquired great spiritual knowledge, but Paul was soon to tell them they did not know as much as they thought they did and what they did know was without complete understanding.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that “*the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.*” The word **testimony** comes from the Greek word *marturion*. It means “to witness.” This “witness” concerns Jesus Christ. The word **confirmed** comes from the Greek *bebaioo* and means “to make firm, establish, make secure.” The witness of Jesus Christ was firm and established in the Corinthian Christians. It’s interesting to note that the word *marturion* was used in church history for Christians who suffered and died for their testimony/witness for Christ (English transliteration - martyr).

What Paul wrote next bring us to our current study about ministry gifts – “*so that you come short in no gift.*” The word **short** in the Greek is *hustereo* and means “come late, be behind, lack, destitute, be wanting.” The word **gift** is the Greek word *charismati* and means “a gift of grace.” Grace (Greek *charis* – unearned, unmerited favor) is the root word for this “gift of grace.” Paul used it a few sentences

earlier when he wrote, *“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus.”* (1 Corinthians 1:4) And remember that the root word for grace is “joy, gladness.”

Paul told the Corinthian believers, in the context of their being called out for sacred service, that included both speech and knowledge in the testimony of Jesus Christ that had been established in them, that he did not want them to be lacking in the area of “gifts of grace.”

Who was the **Source** of their service and their speech and their knowledge and their joy? Jesus Christ! Paul told the Corinthians that he wanted them to “come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This puts everything about the Christian life in its proper perspective. Everything we do, we do as we “eagerly wait” for the “revelation” of our Lord Jesus Christ. The **revelation** of Jesus Christ is *apokalupsis* and means “an uncovering, unveiling.” Christians everywhere in our world today are still eagerly waiting for the unveiling of Jesus Christ. That unveiling or uncovering is the coming of Jesus Christ for His chosen people to take them out of this world and to Himself in Heaven! Paul told the Corinthians, and tells us today, to be involved in holy service to God, and a big part of serving God is using our “grace gifts” to witness for Him.

Amazing! What Paul did in those first 7 verses of 1 Corinthians was point Christians to the Source of their faith and the reason to serve Him. Everything else we read in Paul’s letter goes back to what he said in those first verses in chapter one.

Paul started the section about grace gifts with these words: *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”* (1 Corinthians 12:1-3) Paul knew the Corinthians’ background well. He visited Corinth during his second missionary journey and started the church there. Corinth was well known for its idol worship and wickedness. While some of the early members of the Corinthian church were Jews, most were Gentiles and would have been involved in idol worship prior to trusting Christ for their salvation. Their entire upbringing would have been based on a belief in many gods and worship of them through idols. That’s why Paul wrote, *“You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.”* He reminded them that they had come from a position of spiritual ignorance. They had once worshiped dumb idols (Greek *eidola ta aphonos* – phantom likeness without sound, voiceless idol). He did not want them to be ignorant of something as important as spiritual gifts. They, and we, must not confuse the spiritual world of God to be similar in any way with the spiritual world of evil.

Because the Corinthian Christians had been led astray before in the spiritual realm and were surrounded by family, friends and neighbors who were still deeply involved in idol worship, Paul gave them some excellent advice: *“Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can*

*say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.”* That powerful advice, if followed, would keep the Corinthians safe from the idolatry and spiritual wickedness running rampant in their city and state. Paul’s advice is still true today. Jesus Christ is the Source of all things spiritual for believers. No one speaking by the Spirit of God would or could call Jesus accursed. No one can say sincerely that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

Paul did not want the Corinthian believers to be **ignorant** (Greek *agnoein* – want of knowledge or perception) about **spiritual gifts** (Greek *pneumatikon* – spiritual matters, pertaining to the spiritual). Notice that Paul did not use the same word for gift that he used in 1 Corinthians 1:7 (*charismata*). The word *pneumatikon* has a different root than *charismata*. The root word “spiritual gifts” is *pneuma*, which means “vital breath, spirit.” Paul was using a word that meant the entire range of spiritual matters. That’s what he did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant about. Their ignorance included *charismata*, as we will see as we study Chapters 12 – 14 of 1 Corinthians, but included the whole realm of the spirit world and matters pertaining to it.

Paul then defined four specific areas of *pneumatikon*. They are “gifts,” “ministries,” “activities,” and “manifestation of the Spirit.” We’ll go into more detail about each of these in another chapter, but I want to highlight the Source behind each area of spiritual matters. Here’s what Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all.” 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

Who is the Source of gifts (*charismaton*)? The Holy Spirit.

Who is the Source of ministries (*diakonion*)? The Lord.

Who is the Source of activities (*energmaton*)? God.

Who is the Source of the manifestation (*phanerosis*)? The Holy Spirit.

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the **Source** for everything spiritual in our life. Everything: the gifts, the ministries, the energy to be active and engaged, and the clarity for all to see God working in us. God is everything. He is our Source. He is the Source of our life. He is the Source of our hope. He is the Source of our joy. He is the Source of our peace. **He is – the Great I AM.**

## Ministry Gifts – The Service

We've seen that God is the **Source** for everything in our spiritual life, including ministry gifts. There are diversities (*diarseis* - to take apart) of grace gifts (*charismaton* – gift of grace), but the **same Spirit**. There are differences (*diarseis* – to take apart) of ministries (*diakonion* – service), but the **same Lord**. There are diversities (*diarseis* – to take apart) of activities (*energmaton* – to work, be active, operate, have energy, power), but the **same God** works all in all of us. The manifestation (*phanerosis* – to make clear, visible, open to sight) of the Holy Spirit is given to each of us for the profit (*sumpheron* – useful, expedient) of all of us. God is responsible for every aspect of spiritual service. He determines everything from the gifts we get, the ministries we use them in, the power to accomplish His purpose through our ministry, and how He is glorified through our service.

Now we come to those individual grace gifts to see what they are and why God gives them to us. First, the gifts from 1 Corinthians 12.

“... for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to

each one individually as He wills.” 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

The nine grace gifts mentioned here are: *word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healings, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, different kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues*. Paul emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit in these verses five times. Make a note of that. It is vital in the effectiveness of our grace gifts.

Paul then gave the Corinthians spiritual insights into how the grace gifts bless the Body of Christ. He pointed them to the importance of **unity**. Paul said that the Body is one and has many members, and all the members are one Body, “*so also is Christ.*” The Spirit of God baptized (placed into) every believer into one Body and made (given to) to drink into one Spirit.

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,’ is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now

God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

Paul mentions spiritual gifts again a couple of verses later. He presents some that were not on the earlier list. He also points again to the fact that not everyone has the same or all of the grace gifts. The Holy Spirit gives individually as He Wills.

"And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. *Are* all apostles? *Are* all prophets? *Are* all teachers? *Are* all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts.

And yet I show you a more excellent way.” 1 Corinthians 12:28-31

Paul told the Corinthians to desire the “best gifts.” What were those? What gifts did He mention as coming in an order of first, second, and third? In context, it would seem that the best gifts are those God places at the top of His order. They are apostles, prophets, and teachers. The “more excellent way” Paul had in mind was in the next verse, 1 Corinthians 13:1: *agape* (unconditional love). The gifts and ministries he chose to use as examples of the more excellent way of *agape* were *tongues of men and angels, prophecies, understanding all knowledge and all mysteries, faith, giving, and sacrifice*. Paul said that those gifts and ministries were of no value if *agape* love was not at the forefront of their use in ministry.

It’s important to remember to study the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 along with Chapters 13 and 14. 1 Corinthians 12 – 14 is a single stream of thought that comes from this verse: “*Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.*” (1 Corinthians 12:1) Paul ends his thought with this verse: “*Let all things be done decently and in order.*” (1 Corinthians 14:40) Do you see how beautifully these verses connect and meet the needs of Christians? The Corinthians were ignorant about spiritual matters, which led them to minister in ways that were not done decently nor in order. The same thing has happened in the Church for the past 1,950 plus years and is still a problem today. We need to hear what the Spirit tells us about the dangers of ignorance of spiritual matters.

Paul also listed grace gifts in his letter to the Romans. He first emphasized unity in the Body of Christ, then listed the gifts and how to use them.

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them*: if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; or ministry, *let us use it* in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” Romans 12:4-8

This is great insight from God into what it takes to maximize the use of these gifts. If our grace gift is prophecy, we should prophesy in proportion to our faith. If our gift is ministry (service), we should use it in our ministering. If our gift is teaching, we should teach. If our gift is exhortation, we should exhort. If our gift is giving, we should give with liberality. If our gift is leadership, we should do it with diligence. If our gift is showing mercy, we should do it with cheerfulness. Think about it for a few minutes and what Paul wrote makes tremendous sense in light of what each gift is and does.

Just as we saw with 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, we need to see that Paul’s stream of thought concerning grace gifts begins a few verses earlier and continues beyond the last mention of a gift. Here’s the

important set up to using grace gifts in ministry. Notice that it begins by acknowledging what our reasonable service is in light of what Christ did for us.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Romans 12:1-5

The verses following the specific gifts also give us insight into how God wants us to use our gifts in ministry. The use of each grace gift must be accompanied by character that is in the likeness of Christ’s Character. Everything God asks us to do has already been modeled for us by our **Great Teacher, Jesus**.

“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in

diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:9-21

Just as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said that *agape* love is key to using our grace gifts. I love what he wrote here. It's one of the most powerful, concise commandments from God about how to use our grace gifts properly and to the glory of God. Paul wrote in short sentences that are filled with tremendous meaning. Each sentence could be an entire Bible study, sermon, blog, article, or even a book.

What is your dominant grace gift? I say **dominant** because many believers have more than one gift. Your dominant grace gift will be what drives you in your service to God. If your dominant grace gift is teaching, you will teach in most ministry situations. If your dominant

grace gift is showing mercy, you will show mercy in most ministry situations. If your dominant grace gift is prophecy, you will prophesy in most ministry situations. The same is true for all dominant gifts.

Your **supporting** grace gifts will be what prepares and undergirds you for the ministries God will give you during your lifetime. Remember what we learned earlier about God being the **Source** of our spiritual service: **God the Holy Spirit** gives us grace gifts, **God the Son** gives us ministries, and **God the Father** gives us the spiritual energy to accomplish the objectives He has for our service. God chose you before the foundation of the world to be *“holy and without blame before Him in love.”* (Ephesians 1:4b) God also chose your dominant and supporting grace gifts before the foundation of the world. He chose your ministries before the foundation of the world. Nothing you have is a mistake or an after-thought. God planned it to glorify His Name, meet the spiritual needs of others, and bless you.

So, what is your dominant grace gift? Whatever it is will be exactly what you'll need to perform the ministries God has planned for you. Is your gift prophecy? Then prophesy! Is your gift teaching? Then teach! Is your gift exhortation? Then exhort! Is your gift giving? Then give with liberality! Is your gift leadership? Then lead with diligence! Is your gift showing mercy? Then do it with cheerfulness!

Here's a list of grace gifts from Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

- Apostleship
- Prophecy
- Ministry
- Teaching
- Exhortation
- Giving
- Leading
- Showing mercy
- Wisdom
- Knowledge
- Discerning of spirits
- Speaking in tongues
- Interpretation of tongues
- Prophecy
- Faith
- Working of miracles
- Healing

I believe some grace gifts are dominant gifts, while others are support gifts. You have at least one dominant gift, along with one or more support gifts. If you know what your gifts are and are using them in the ministries God has opened for you, you know what a great joy it is to be in God's service. If you know what your gifts are, but are not using them in ministry — get together with God today and ask Him to show you what He wants you to do with the gifts He gave you.

If you do not know what your gifts are, discover them. God may show you without anyone else being involved. I learned what my gifts were through quiet, determined, direct Bible study over a period of several months. What God showed me in His Word was different than what other Christians told me about my gifts. Knowing directly from God helped me make the decisions that turned me toward the right kinds of ministries for my gifts. You may look at the gifts list and know what God has given you without needing to study about them. The Lord may make it clear to you. God may also use other Christians to help you discover your gifts. Talk with mature believers who are using their gifts in active service. Ask them how they discovered their gifts and their ministries. You can also find some great spiritual gift tests online and at Christian bookstores. Let God be the final Voice you listen to about your gifts and ministries and you will always be on the right path.

## Ministry Gifts – The Support

I've heard it said that it's easier to love God than it is to love people. I think the same is true in ministry. It's easier to serve God than it is to serve people. Serving God is a great joy. He is All-Powerful, All-Knowing, Everywhere-Present and Unchanging. People, on the other hand, are weak, often missing in action, tough to find when you need them, constantly changing, and often in opposition to what you lead them to do. Ministering to people demands a lot from us because people are so needy.

Jesus knew exactly what He was calling His disciples to do when He sent them out to minister in a world that doesn't like Him – or us for that matter. And even when unsaved people receive Christ as their Savior and Lord and the Holy Spirit lives inside of them, they are still a challenge to serve in the Name of Jesus (so are we sometimes). That's why He gave the Body of Christ **support gifts**.

There are two types of support gifts in the Bible. Those are the **grace gifts** that support your **dominant gift(s)** in your service to God and others. The second type of support gifts are what God gives to the Body of Christ to **equip** Christians for their works of service. Look at what the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesian Christians.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that

He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:7-16

More gifts! The Christian life is amazing. Every time we look around we see that God has given us another gift. God designed a life for His children that is about **following**, **loving** and **serving** Him while He continually **gives us gifts**. Can you imagine growing up in a family like that? What an amazing childhood that would be. We love and serve our parents and they give us wonderful gifts every day of our lives. That's what it's like to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We work hard, we study hard, we serve God and His people, reach out with

love to the unsaved world to tell them the wonderful story of salvation — and God showers us with gifts every day of our lives. Wow!

Paul told the Ephesians that each one of them had received grace (*charis*) from God according to the measure (*metron* – measuring standard) of Christ's gift (*doreas* – free gift that stresses its gratuitous character). Paul told the believers that when Jesus ascended to Heaven He took captivity captive (from the Messianic Psalm 68) and “*gave gifts to men.*” The **gifts** that Jesus gave to men is the Greek word *domata*. It signifies the strong character of the gift. Paul uses the plural of the word that demonstrate the generous nature of the Giver, Jesus Christ. Our Lord Personally gave these gifts to us – “*And He Himself gave.*” Jesus did not assign someone else this gift-giving work — just as He didn't assign someone else to die on the Cross for the sins of the world. Jesus wanted to give these gifts in Person.

What did He give the Church? “... *some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.*” And why did Jesus give these gifts to His Body? “... *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” God sends out His grace-gifted people to minister to a lost and dying world **equipped** for the work of their ministry. The word equipped is *katartismos* and means “making fit, putting in readiness, preparing fully.” God wants us to be fully prepared to accomplish His goals for the ministries He gives us, so He gifts some Christians with **equipping gifts** to prepare the Body of Christ to use their **grace gifts**. The great result is the **edifying** (building up, growth) of the Body of Christ!

Many Christians I've talked with through the years believe that the work of the ministry is done by professional ministers (i.e. pastors, evangelists, missionaries, Bible scholars, seminary professors), but that's not how God designed the Body of Christ to work. Ephesians 4 was the light bulb that went off in my mind and heart decades ago when I spent several months in serious study to understand God's Will for my service to Him and His Church. I saw clearly that the ministry is done by every member of the Body of Christ. Those who Christ gave to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers have the job of preparing God's people for their works of service, their ministries. That makes so much sense! God gifts a small number of His children (*some to be*) to prepare the large number of His children (*till we all*) to do the work He has given His Church to accomplish for His Glory. But is that the way it works today? Unfortunately not. In fact, it's reversed. The majority of Christians expect a small number of professionals to do the work of the ministry. The great challenge we all face in the Church today is to **turn that around**.

If you are an apostle (in the sense that *apostolos* means 'one sent forth'), job #1 is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. If you are a prophet (in the sense of preaching, proclaiming - *prophetes*, one who speaks forth or openly), job #1 is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. If you are an evangelist (*euangelistes*, messenger of good), job #1 is to equip the saints for the work of the

ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. If you are a pastor (*poimen*, shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks), job #1 is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. If you are a teacher (*didaskalos*, instructor), job #1 is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers all have their own individual ministries to the saved and unsaved, but when it comes to Christians our job is to equip all believers for their works of service. In fulfilling that calling and gifting from our Lord, Christians with equipping gifts play an important role in the building up of the Body of Christ.

How long should we equip the saints? Is a year long enough? How about two or three years? Here's how long God recommends: *"... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."* Doesn't sound like there's an end to our equipping ministry. It's not something we can accomplish in months or years. Equipping God's people for their ministries will take a lifetime.

Paul often used the human body as a framework to explain the working of the Body of Christ. He does it here in Ephesians 4 in the context of Jesus giving gifts to Christians who should use their gifts to equip other Christians for their works of service. Paul refers to those

gifted people (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) as **joints**: *“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”* The human body is made up of bones and muscles and tissue, along with organs, glands, blood and nerves. What is it that holds all of this together and gives trillions of cells the ability to move cohesively? Joints. Take away the joints of the human body and it can’t move. It’s still a human body, but it can’t go anywhere or accomplish much.

The joints are vital to the function of the body. Joints connect bones, muscles, tendons and ligaments and allow the body to move in a wide variety of directions. The shoulder joint, elbow joint, wrist joint, hand joints, finger joints, hip joint, knee joint, ankle joint, foot joints and toe joints are what give the human body functionality. Joints come in many shapes, sizes and purposes. They may be ball-and-socket joints, hinge joints, pivot joints, fixed joints, saddle joints, condyloid joints, synovial joints, cartilagenous joints or gliding joints, but they all function together to make the body work as it was designed.

So it is with the gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Their gifts are different, but their purpose is the same: prepare the Body of Christ to move in the direction God sends it. The Greek word used for joint here is *haphē* and means “to fit, to fasten.” Christians with equipping gifts work with God’s Spirit to make the

Body of Christ fit. You might say that some of us are in the spiritual “fitness” business.

Jesus uses apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to help connect Christians to their ministries and to each other and prepare them to move as God calls them to move. Notice the spiritual process the Lord has designed for His Body:

- Jesus gives gifts to men (**The Giver**)
- From whom the whole Body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies (**the equippers**)
- According to the effective working by which every part does its share (**the workers, ministers**)
- Causes growth of the Body for the edifying of itself in love (**the growth that brings glory to God**)

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers do the work of **joining** and **knitting** the Body together. The Greek word for joining is *sunarmologeo* and means “to fit or frame together.” It means “fitly framed together.” The Greek word for knitting is *sumbibazo* and means “to unite, to join, to knit together.” This uniting and equipping ministry of those with support or “joint” gifts leads to a Body of believers that functions well and accomplishes the goals of its Designer. That function is made up of individual believers who do the work God has called them to do (*“which every part does its share”*). The end result of that causes growth of the Body – *“for the edifying of itself in love.”* Even though the human body and Body of Christ are

both complicated in design and structure, the purpose is simple: **to glorify the Designer.**

Let's put this wonderful segment of Scripture in its larger context. A careful study of Ephesians Chapters 1 -3 will prepare us to maximize the meaning of Chapter 4. In Chapters 1 and 2, Paul wrote to the Ephesians about their **spiritual redemption** through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In Chapter 3, Paul wrote about the **mystery** God revealed to him and its blessing for Christians. He then reminded the believers about the absolute necessity for **unity** in the Body of Christ at the beginning of Chapter 4:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all." Ephesians 4:1-6

Before Paul says one word about spiritual grace gifts, he points Christians to the need for **unity** in the Body. Every time Paul wrote about spiritual gifts, he wrote in the context of spiritual unity. Spiritual gifts without spiritual love and unity are not pleasing to God (1 Corinthians 13) and accomplish little to nothing of eternal value. We will never accomplish God's Will for our lives or the life of our

ministries unless we love one another and are unified firmly around God's Purpose for ministry and giftedness.

My prayers are with you as you consider all that God has given you: your salvation, your grace gifts, your ministries and the people you touch for Jesus Christ. For those of you who have gifts God uses to equip other believers for their works of service, my prayers are with you that you will have the wisdom and strength to accomplish the great goal of preparing the saints for their ministry, to the edifying of the Body of Christ in love.

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