

April 22, 2018

“Christ’s Gifts to His People”

Ephesians 4:11-12

FCF: Disconnect b/w officer nominations and any seeming relevance

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Christ has given gifts to His Church.

(magnet) We should receive them with gladness and rejoice in His goodness.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

This is to be the first of two messages preparing us for the process of nominating some men to serve in our church as elders and deacons. Who is the Lord raising up? This morning, I’d like to introduce the topic with the plan to say some specific things on each office next week.

That said, I realize that what I just said immediately raises some concern for some of us. *“I know this is important. But what does this really have to do with me? I have bills to pay. My family is a mess. The doctors can’t help. And tomorrow scares the spit out of me. So I get that the whole nomination thing is important. But how will this help me with what I’m facing?”*

Good questions for which there are answers. But we need to look at something else first. *“Where do the leaders of the church come from?”* Yes, we have a nomination-election process. But behind the process, that is just a confirmation. God has already chosen them. He is now simply thrusting them forward. Their task is from Him and they are truly responsible to Him.

“Interesting” we say. *“But how does that help me?”* Hang on. Let’s find out.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Besides pollen, Spring is also a season of gift giving - Mother’s Day, graduation, and then Father’s Day. The best gifts? The classics rarely fail – a card in your own words, flowers, music, books. Go classic or go creative. Just be attentive to the things others want and need.

What is Paul saying in our text? Christ gives His people gifts. He intends for there to be unity and diversity in His church. The unity between us is a reflection of the Trinity itself. That said, there is also diversity, consisting of gifts apportioned and distributed by our exalted King. Paul quotes Psalm 68, a text portraying the Lord as conqueror, leading a victorious procession, distributing the spoils of His victory to His people. And what Paul is implying is that this psalm points to and was fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the One spoken of as having descended in His incarnation and ascended in His exaltation. And He has given gifts to His people, to the Church.

Not according to our grand purposes, our soaring ambitions, or our low deserving. But according to His purposes, to His measure. Christ has given gifts to His Church. And we should receive these gifts with gladness and rejoice in His goodness – all the more as we consider two things. First, what these gifts are that are given to us. And, second, why they are given to us.

I. THE GIFTS CHRIST HAS GIVEN TO HIS PEOPLE

First, what are the gifts? ([READ Ephesians 4:11](#)) Other places in the New Testament list talents and abilities given by Christ. But not here. Here, the gifts are people. Who are they?

A) *Passing from the Scene*

Some are temporary, passing from the scene, given until the completion of the canon.

1. Apostles

The apostles – men personally chosen and authorized by Christ, witnesses to His resurrection, their teaching preserved for us and passed down to us through the New Testament Scriptures.

2. Prophets

The prophets – speaking at the time with the apostles but not in an ongoing sense as the apostles. Again, their words inspired by the Holy Spirit but speaking only in a former age as needed.

B) *Permanent through the Years*

They've passed from the scene. But not all for others are permanent through the years.

1. Evangelists

Evangelists – itinerant preachers, missionaries, those reaching the unreached with the gospel.

2. Shepherds and teachers

Shepherds and teachers – possibly referring to one office here, pastoral instructors in the faith.

The point being that the risen ruling Christ has given gifts to His Church. And, among those gifts are not only talents and abilities but people such as the ones listed here. How should such gifts be received? How should they be regarded – whether the permanent or the passing?

Illustration:

Imagine, if you can, the scene in Manhattan on September 11, 2001 at “Ground Zero.” Those grand towers of glass, steel, and concrete had been reduced to a smoldering pile of rubble. Who was called to the scene? Firefighters, policeman, paramedics. And what kind of reception did they receive? A sigh of relief, salutes, prayers for their safety. A grateful response by people who knew themselves to be in desperate need. And there are some parallels worth noting here.

Application:

Now don't be confused. No, elders and deacons are not mentioned in this text. But the principle surely stands as we see the importance Paul placed on appointing such men wherever he planted churches. And in the searching qualifications he laid out for them in his letters. Elders and deacons are implied in this list as being among God's gifts to His church today.

But how are such gifts often regarded? Often too lightly. For at least a couple of reasons. One would be our present age of postmodernism. “No one has the right to speak with authority because no one is right.” So it goes. There's the present age of postmodernism. But then there's the hidden pain of projection, hurt carried over, a guilt by association which destroys all trust. Now, of course, such men are far from perfect. But God has placed them among us. It's of Him.

Which takes us to another problem – how such servants often regard themselves. Again, far too lightly. Who has given them to us? Not to say for a minute they should have an attitude of “*I'm God's gift to the church.*” There should be humility. But there should also be certainty. And with that certainty, boldness and courage of purpose, clarity and conviction of message.

Christ has given gifts to His Church. That's cause to rejoice in His goodness.

II. WHY CHRIST HAS GIVEN THEM TO HIS PEOPLE

But why? What are they for? What does He have in mind? (READ Ephesians 4:11-12)

The rest unpacks that even more. But let's sum it up by saying it's for spiritual body building.

A) *The Immediate Purpose*

In two phases with two goals in mind. First, a more immediate short-range purpose.

1. To equip the saints

To prepare, equip the saints. That is, to get them from where they are to where they need to be.

2. That they might serve

With what in mind? That the church would be mobilized, carrying out the "work of ministry."

The ministry is not to be left to the professionals. It is to be carried out by the people. That is Christ's design. Pay attention here. This is where some translations insert "the comma from hell," making v.12 to read "to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up the body of Christ." But it's not three things. It's two. All the saints, all of us, are to be equipped, prepared, and engaged in the work of ministry. Anything less is a misshapen monstrosity.

Illustration:

What we don't want is what we see at most sporting events - a small collection of active folks down on a field or a court, desperately in need of rest, and several thousand people up in the stands, passively watching and desperately in need of exercise! This is not a spectator sport.

B) *The Ultimate Purpose*

The immediate purpose for this gifting by Christ of His church is the equipping of the saints that they might serve. But there is a long-range, even more ultimate purpose here as well.

1. Extensive growth

And it is growth, the "building up the body of Christ." Extensive growth as the body grows in size, each part doing its part, all being mobilized, and more being added to the numbers.

2. Intensive growth

But that isn't the only type of growth. There is intensive growth as well - a growing in maturity and depth. Not so much in size as in strength. Again, all this happens as each part does its part.

This is what the risen ruling Christ has in mind in the giving of His gifts to His church.

Illustration:

What does this tell us? His means of growth are not ours. Which, given what we are prone to do, should bring us great relief. *The Wall Street Journal* reported a few years ago of a large church that held a wrestling match between church employees in one of the worship services. Another article described a pastor ending one service by ascending via invisible wires that drew him up while the orchestra and choir added musical accompaniment. That was coupled with smoke, lights, and fireworks in the sanctuary. Just brilliant, isn't it? Not really.

Application:

Christ's ways of growth are not ours. His ways to grow His church are through His gifts to His church, each part doing its part. Why is this vital to remember? Because of crushing temptations from one of two sides. First, the temptation of pride for the professional, the elite. *"I'm paid to be good. You people are good for nothing."* Or more seriously, *"I have the training and the experience,"* forgetting about the reality and the absolute necessity of every-member-ministry to flourish if there is to be growth. But then there is a strong temptation on the other side as well. The people, the body itself, can drift into laziness, relying upon the professional, the expert. *"Aren't they the ones with the titles?"* forgetting that we are all called and equipped.

His ways are not ours. If it was up to me, I would never call a man like me or any other in this church to serve as an officer. I'd send angels, a whole squad. Why does Jesus do it as He does? That we might see a demonstration of the gospel – strength showing itself in weakness, treasure within clay pots. That's why. His ways are not ours. They never are. They're better.

Christ has given gifts to His church. That's cause to rejoice in His goodness.

CONCLUSION:

Again, this is the first of two messages preparing us for the process of nominating men as elders and deacons. It's an introduction to the subject. And there is relevance here for us all. *"How so?"* The goodness of God is reflected in these gifts of God. The one reveals the other.

Some of you know I went on a trip to Israel a few years ago. An all-inclusive package was purchased. It took care of everything – airfare, hotels, breakfast and dinner, transportation, the itinerary, the guides to walk us through each site. They even structured the schedule to give us a free afternoon in Jerusalem and time one day to celebrate the Lord's Supper together at a Garden Tomb. All the arrangements were made. All you had to do was show up at the right time and the right place each morning and be ready for another adventure. Nothing was left out. They took care of everything. So you could imagine why I'm quick to say that I'd go back.

There's something of that for us to consider here. The goodness of God is reflected in these gifts of God. Which helps us to trust Him all the more. And we need as many reminders of His goodness as we can get. That goes back to the Garden of Eden when our first parents listened to Satan and, without any reason whatsoever, began to question if God could be trusted. Friends, we've been perpetual skeptics and cynics ever since. *"Is what He said really true? Can I trust Him to be there in the thick of things? Will He stay with me when I fail? Is He good?"*

Yes. Absolutely, yes. We see God's goodness to us reflected in His gifts for us. Christ is Lord of the Church. No, He is not physically present with us. But listen. He is spiritually present and purposefully ruling through the men He raises up. He is the Elder, the Deacon. He's covered and thought of everything. Which means there's no need for us to fret in any area of our lives. So we're freed to be faithful, to follow and trust Him. Christ has given these gifts to His church. We should receive them with gladness and rejoice all the more in His goodness.

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