

**THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND**  
**THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:**  
**A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**  
**(LESSON FORTY-SEVEN)**  
**“A GIFTED BUT CARNAL CHURCH”**

**EPHESIANS 4:1-7**

*1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

*3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;*

*5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

*6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

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

In verses **4-6**, of our text, Paul lists 7 basic spiritual realities, or 7 elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. These are **One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism**, and **One God**. These 7 spiritual realities, or elements of oneness, form the ground or basis of the Church's unity, and should have the effect of persuading believers to make every effort to keep, or preserve, or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In verse **7**, Paul writes, “*But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*” In this verse, Paul transitions from focusing on the Church as a whole, to focusing on the individual members of the Church. He is still concerned with the matter of preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, but he moves from discussing what all believers have in common, to looking at how believers differ from each other. He discusses variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit, and argues that unity is not inconsistent with a variety of gifts and offices.

The question naturally arises as to how unity, which has been so strongly emphasized in the first six verses of the chapter, may be preserved in the light of this diversity and variation? Paul gives us the answer in verses **7** through **16**. In these verses, he explains how the body of Christ, even though it is characterized by diversity, is held together in unity.

Brothers and sisters, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift, or out of His generosity. The reason why unity and diversity can co-exist in the Body of Christ is because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Head of the Body, and being the Head, He is the Giver of the variety of gifts which are enjoyed by the Church as a whole, and by every single member in particular. This principle guarantees the unity in the diversity!

God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift, and this gift is to be used for the unifying and edifying, or building up of the body of Christ. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified.

It is very important for us to appreciate that the gifts of the Spirit are not necessarily a means of judging the depth of a person's spiritual life. We often make the mistake of thinking that because a person speaks in tongues a lot, and/or manifests other gifts of the Spirit that they are necessarily mature spiritually. But this is often not the reality. In this **Lesson**, we will turn our attention from the church at Ephesus to the church at Corinth in order to emphasize the fact that “giftedness” does not necessarily equate to spiritual maturity. We will first look briefly at Paul's introductory remarks in his letter to the Corinthians.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 1:1-9**

*1 Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,  
2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's:*

*3 Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

*4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

*5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

*6 Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

*7 So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

*8 Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*9 God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.*

In verse 4 Paul writes, *"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ."* The Apostle gave thanks to God always for the Corinthian believers, even though they were immature in their faith and their lifestyle was characterized by immaturity, carnality, worldliness and immorality. He did not thank God for their immaturity, carnality, worldliness or immorality, but rather for who and what they were in Christ. He thanked God for what He had done for them and for all of their spiritual wealth in Christ. Because of Jesus Christ, the Corinthian believers had become recipients of God's grace. It is solely on the basis of the grace of God that they had received anything from Him. It is His grace alone which had given them their exalted position and possessions in Christ.

It appears that these Corinthian believers did not understand the nature and purpose of the grace of God which they had been given. They seemed to have reasoned that since they were saved, they could live any way they wanted to. They were abusing the grace of God and using it as an excuse for immoral living. What they failed to see was that the grace of God had set them free from sin, in order that they might freely worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 5 Paul writes, *"That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge."* The grace of God had enriched or made wealthy the Corinthian believers. In a spiritual sense, they had been blessed beyond measure, especially in the area of spiritual gifts. They were, so to speak, spiritual billionaires. This is confirmed by Paul's statement in verse 7, *"So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *"so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

**The Message** translates the verse in the following way, *"Just think — you don't need a thing, you've got it all! All God's gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale."*

Obviously, as it related to spiritual gifts, the church at Corinth was exceedingly prosperous. In fact, one wonders if there was ever any local church that was blessed with the abundance of spiritual gifts that this Corinthian church was blessed with. It is likely that they had some very exciting meetings!

The Corinthian church had all the gifts, but the gifts did not make them Christ-like. It made the church exciting, but it did not make the members mature in Christ. They were "spirited" but not spiritual. As we have noted earlier, the church was characterized by immaturity, carnality, worldliness and immorality. The internal evidence in the letter itself clearly indicates that this was the case.

We will consider some passages from this letter which highlight the immaturity, carnality, worldliness and immorality of the Corinthian believers. All the passages will reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-13**

*10 I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose.*

*11 For members of Chloe's household have made it clear to me, my brothers and sisters, that there are quarrels among you.*

*12 Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," or "I am with Cephas," or "I am with Christ."*

*13 Is Christ divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? Or were you in fact baptized in the name of Paul?*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-4**

*1 So, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but instead as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.*

*2 I fed you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready. In fact, you are still not ready,*

*3 for you are still influenced by the flesh. For since there is still jealousy and dissension among you, are you not influenced by the flesh and behaving like unregenerate people?*

*4 For whenever someone says, "I am with Paul," or "I am with Apollos," are you not merely human?*

In verse **12** of chapter **16**, as he was concluding his letter, Paul wrote the following: *"With regard to our brother Apollos: I strongly encouraged him to visit you with the other brothers, but it was simply not his intention to come now. He will come when he has the opportunity."* It is my opinion that one of the reasons why Apollos was not minded to visit Corinth when Paul asked him to, was because of the lack of unity that existed in the church. It must have disturbed him greatly. He was probably concerned that his presence there would only serve to deepen the division, and so he thought it best not to go there at that time.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2**

*1 It is actually reported that sexual immorality exists among you, the kind of immorality that is not permitted even among the Gentiles, so that someone is cohabiting with his father's wife.*

*2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you have been deeply sorrowful instead and removed the one who did this from among you?*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8**

*1 When any of you has a legal dispute with another, does he dare go to court before the unrighteous rather than before the saints?*

*2 Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to settle trivial suits?*

*3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? Why not ordinary matters!*

*4 So if you have ordinary lawsuits, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church?*

*5 I say this to your shame! Is there no one among you wise enough to settle disputes between fellow Christians?*

*6 Instead, does a Christian sue a Christian, and do this before unbelievers?*

*7 The fact that you have lawsuits among yourselves demonstrates that you have already been defeated. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*

*8 But you yourselves wrong and cheat, and you do this to your brothers and sisters!*

## **1 CORINTHIANS 6:15-20**

*15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never!*

*16 Or do you not know that anyone who is united with a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, “**The two will become one flesh.**”*

*17 But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him.*

*18 Flee sexual immorality! “Every sin a person commits is outside of the body” — but the immoral person sins against his own body.*

*19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*

*20 For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*

## **1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-3**

*1 With regard to food sacrificed to idols, we know that “we all have knowledge.” Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*

*2 If someone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know to the degree that he needs to know.*

*3 But if someone loves God, he is known by God.*

## **1 CORINTHIANS 10:14-22**

*14 So then, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.*

*15 I am speaking to thoughtful people. Consider what I say.*

*16 Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ?*

*17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one bread.*

*18 Look at the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?*

*19 Am I saying that idols or food sacrificed to them amount to anything?*

*20 No, I mean that what the pagans sacrifice is to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons.*

*21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot take part in the table of the Lord and the table of demons.*

*22 Or are we trying to provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we really stronger than he is?*

## **1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-22**

*17 Now in giving the following instruction I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.*

*18 For in the first place, when you come together as a church I hear there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.*

*19 For there must in fact be divisions among you, so that those of you who are approved may be evident.*

*20 Now when you come together at the same place, you are not really eating the Lord’s Supper.*

*21 For when it is time to eat, everyone proceeds with his own supper. One is hungry and another becomes drunk.*

*22 Do you not have houses so that you can eat and drink? Or are you trying to show contempt for the church of God by shaming those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I will not praise you for this!*

Paul hints at the Corinthian believers’ lack of maturity in chapter **13**. In verse **11** he writes, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

*But when I became an adult, I set aside childish ways.”* It is noteworthy that he writes this to them in the context of the proper operation of spiritual gifts.

In chapter **14** and verse **20**, he again implies that in the operation of the spiritual gifts the members lacked maturity: *“Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking. Instead, be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.”*

Brothers and sisters, it should be very clear to us that a person may be operating one or more of the gifts of the Spirit and at the same time be a very carnal individual. A person may be very gifted and at the same time not be guided by the Holy Spirit in the use of His gifts. The believers in Corinth were abusing the spiritual gifts because of their immaturity, carnality, worldliness and immorality. Because their hearts were not right with God, they used the gifts of the Spirit for their own glory rather than for the glory of God.

It is remarkable that in **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**, Paul thanks God for the gifts that He has graciously bestowed on the Corinthian church, even though the abuses of these gifts by the believers were causing him so much grief. Paul recognized that the problem in Corinth was not in their gifts but in their attitude towards the gifts. They thought that because they were not lacking in any spiritual gift, they were more spiritual and more mature, than other believers. Their pride and arrogance blinded them to their immaturity, carnality, worldliness and immorality. The reason Paul could give thanks in spite of all this, is that these spiritual gifts had come from God. It was not God’s fault that they were being terribly abused. The gifts were intrinsically good; something was wrong with the way they were being manifested; something was wrong with the way the gifts were being manifested because something was wrong with the people who were manifesting them!

In **1 Corinthians 4:7**, Paul lets the believers know that all their spiritual gifts had come from God and there was no room for boasting or feelings of superiority. *“For who concedes you any superiority? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not?”* (**New English Translation**) God had given these gifts to enhance their witness and testimony, but because of their abuse of them, their witness and testimony was actually being hindered and they were bitterly divided.

Verse **7** implies that all the spiritual gifts will be in existence to some degree until the second coming of Jesus Christ: *“so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* All the epistles, including **1 Corinthians**, indicate the Church in general is not perfect and will not be until Christ returns, and many churches, like the one in Corinth, have a long way yet to go as it related to spiritual maturity. **The Grace Workshop Ministries** is certainly in this category. Every believer, however, should be using his or her spiritual gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ until the Lord returns for His Church.

In verse **8**, Paul tells the Corinthian believers that the Lord will, *“confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The word “confirm” is the translation of a Greek word which means “to make firm, establish, confirm, make sure.” It refers to that which is secured or guaranteed. The word was used as a legal guarantee for the deliverance of goods. Paul is giving these believers in Corinth the assurance that God will secure them to the end! The end of course, refers to the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ at His second coming. He is giving them a guarantee that God had secured their salvation and would take them to heaven.

Paul is speaking here, not of the ability of the believer to persevere to the end, but rather of the ability of God to keep each one of His children saved right to the end. The reason that all the elect will persevere to the end is because God guarantees it.

The word “blameless” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “irreproachable, above reproach.” It refers to a person, who after he or she is properly scrutinized or examined in a court of law, is found to be not convictable. It is not possible to accuse or charge him or her.

When the believer appears before the Judgment Seat of Christ, he or she will be so perfect that no charge can be made against him or her. At that time, believers will be judged and rewarded for the good and bad things they did in their bodies while on earth, but “in Christ,” they will be found blameless and unaccusable.

*“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1 New English Translation).*

*Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is the one who will condemn? Christ is the one who died (and more than that, he was raised), who is at the right hand of God, and who also is interceding for us” (Romans 8:33-34 New English Translation).*

It is remarkable that Paul could express such confidence about the destiny of the Corinthian believers when their present behaviour was anything but blameless. The truth is that we see believers as they are now, but God already sees them as the finished product that they will one day be. The Corinthian Christians had not yet arrived spiritually, but God knew that one day they would. He knows how the movie will end.

In verse 9 Paul writes, *“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This statement tells us why we will be preserved to the end. It is not because we possess a great, indestructible faith; it is not because of our rugged determination to hold on. It is because God is faithful and He will confirm or secure us to the end. In **Galatians 2:20** Paul writes, *“I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live **because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**”*

The fact that every believer will stand blameless in God’s presence does not depend upon our faith but upon the faithfulness of Christ. Our security is grounded, not in our goodness but in the character of God.

We may have doubts at times about the reality of the security of our position in Christ, but God is faithful even over our doubts. Since God has given us this great salvation, we ought to live our lives in accordance with our calling and position, as well as the promise that we will one day be in His presence.

Paul says that God called us *“unto the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This is certainly one of the key verses of **1 Corinthians**. The rest of the letter centers around it. God called these Corinthian believers into a very important relationship fellowship with Jesus Christ the Lord. Notice that they were called into fellowship with Christ as Lord. The reason for all the problems in the Corinthian church was that they did not understand the implications of their calling and their relationship with Christ, nor were they submitted to the Lordship of Christ in their experience.

**Ray Stedman** has observed that when we forget that we have been called into fellowship with Jesus Christ as Lord, we drift into that terrible syndrome of honouring Him on Sunday and neglecting Him from Monday through Saturday. When we find ourselves in this situation, He is no longer the Lord of all of our life, but only of a part of it. If He is not Lord of our life all day long, then He is Lord only of the margins, only of the leftovers, only of Sunday.

What are we to take away from **1 Corinthians 1:4-7**? We need to appreciate the fact that we are rich beyond measure with spiritual blessings in Christ. We have all received spiritual gifts that God wants us to use and not abuse, in order to unify and edify the Body of Christ and to glorify Him. We need to assure ourselves of the truth that we are secure in Christ. He possesses us and we possess Him. Fellowship with Jesus Christ and the recognition of His Lordship over our lives is the key to prevent us from becoming carnal, worldly and immoral and to ensure that we become spiritually mature. It is when we realize our spiritual wealth in Christ that we will have the basis for godly living as Christians.