

Bible Basics Conference 2015: The church

Part 6

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[00:00:00] Well, this next session is on gifts, and for this we need to bear in mind the first session that our brother Hans Rudi brought out, because in many respects, before we look at the relevance of this subject to the expression of the local assembly, we need to, as it were, zoom back the telescope, or the microscope, and bear in mind the whole assembly in its aspect as our brother very helpfully brought out in session one. Because we're reading from Ephesians chapter 4, and I might just read it in one section, because it's very important that we base everything on God's Word. So Ephesians 4 and chapter verse 1, I therefore the prisoner [00:01:01] of the Lord beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are 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. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore, he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto them. Now that he 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, [00:02:05] that he might fill all things. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 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. So, we're going to go back to the slide that's just been on the screen in a second, but the wonderful principle that this passage brings out is this diversity and unity. And we've been reminded of the one body, in the verses we've read together, [00:03:06] there's one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And our brother Hans Rudy this morning reminded us that from God's side, there is one assembly, there's one church, there's one body. And from God's side, it can be seen, even today, regrettably, from man's side, we can't see it, unless by faith. What we see, of course, is solemnly breakdown and division. But nevertheless, that doesn't at all take away from the truth of the verses we've read together, that there is one body. And the wonderful thing is that in the gifts of God, this unity is displayed, it's to be worked out, and yet it's [00:04:02] to be worked out in diversity. In other words, we're not all copycats one of another. This unity is not brought about by God making us all carbon copies of each other. It's not a matter of uniformity. It's not a matter of all doing the same

thing. There's a difference. Uniformity and unity are quite different things. The one we might say is what man attempts. Man thinks if we can get everybody doing the same thing, then we have unity. No, that's not the way it should work. God's way of bringing about unity is by means of what differs. And there's, there are different gifts. We're all different. How wonderful that each one of us is unique. And yet, and it's very difficult perhaps to comprehend, and yet the result of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the [00:05:02] outcome is that we're one. We're all members of one body. And that's a wonderful thing. So let's bear in mind this wonderful principle that the means by which God demonstrates and manifests this unity is by using those who are very different and yet in a spiritual, a happy sense of spiritual cooperation and unity of purpose, we give expression to the one, the one body, the one church. So let's just go back to this first slide. What I'm trying to illustrate here is firstly the unity of the Godhead. There is one God, the triune God, and yet he's, God has been revealed in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And here we have this [00:06:01] symbol showing that although we have three persons of the Godhead, God is one. And in regard to the subject of gifts, we can see that all three persons of the Godhead are involved. So in Romans 12, when you read the list of gifts there, you'll see that they're described as the gifts of God. And in the passage that we're looking at now in Ephesians 4, they're Christ's gifts. And in Corinthians, which we'll look, another session we'll look at later on, they're really the gifts or the operations of the Holy Spirit. So there's three different ways of looking at the subjects of gifts, and the lists of gifts are different in each of those three sections. But what we can say is this, there's a happy unity. There's a unity of purpose. There's a unity in the way they work or operate, and we can say that all gifts are God-given. God, the Holy Spirit, and the person [00:07:09] of the Lord Jesus Christ. So there's this happy plurality and yet a blessed unity. The verses we've read together in Ephesians speak of the coming into this scene of the Lord Jesus. And the expression used was that, verse 9, he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth.

And we should remember the basis of the gifts that we're looking at in this session are the really what flows out of the sessions we've looked at already in regards to the supper. It's the person and the work of Christ. It's his death, the sacrificial death, his body given, and the [00:08:08] shedding of his precious blood. And we know that that involved the most solemn humiliation and suffering of our blessed Lord. He descended into the lowest parts of the earth. He suffered. And yet this same one, this one who suffered, who men rejected, is risen. He's not a dead Christ that gives gifts, but the risen Christ. And in this slide, I've tried to illustrate in the arrow on your left this wonderful truth that he's risen from the dead. And not only that, but he's ascended into heaven, we might say, into the Father's presence. He's now seated at God's right hand. And it's from this wonderful place of his being ascended from such heights of glory that he's [00:09:09] given gifts to men. And so we can see here that the gifts are sent down. And in our passage, when it says in verse 8, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. There's an allusion here to the victor of a battle. And in Old Testament times, I suppose in historical days, the victor of an army would parade the losers, take their captives captive, and there'd be the spoils of war. And the spoils of war would be distributed. And so there's a little allusion to this matter of the Lord Jesus as the victorious one, the one who's [00:10:06] conquered death. He's triumphed over death, over Satan. And it's as a consequence of that victory and that work that he distributes gifts. So from on high, he sends gifts down. Now I have here in the picture a little illustration of some gifts and presents. And my point wasn't to trivialize the matter, but just to give us a visual reminder of when we receive gifts. It's a nice, happy thing, isn't it? And we might ask ourselves, what do we have to do to earn a gift? And the answer is, well, that question doesn't make sense. We don't do anything to earn a gift. That's the point of a gift. It's something that's given to us. We don't work for it. When we work, we work for wages. We [00:11:07] don't work for gifts. So if we receive a gift, we ought to be mindful of this, that it's

not something we deserve or for which we've worked, but it's a matter of grace. And I think the answer to the question, what do you have to do to receive a gift is nothing but simply be loved. If we receive a gift, it's normally a token of the love of the giver towards us. And I think that's a very happy thought to bear in mind in regard to this session. The Lord Jesus loved us and he loved us so much that he went to the very lowest depths of suffering. But having come out of that suffering, having ascended on high, he's given gifts as a token of his love because his bride, this figure [00:12:02] of which we've been reminded, it's to be spotless. It's to be suitable to him. And it has to be perfect. And in order to be perfect, we need work. And that's why he sent gifts down that those of us who make up his body might be perfected. And that's what we come to. It's verse 12, for the perfecting of the saints. And verse 13, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man. So that brings in the object, the purpose of these gifts. Well, in these verses, in verse 11, we have here this short list. In Romans and Corinthians, we have a different list of gifts, but here there's just these five. And we might look at it [00:13:02] in a way we might count them as four. But anyway, we have these five in the list. And the way that this verse is phrased is this. I've emphasized this word, some, because it says, and he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. Now, I emphasize the word some. Let's reread the verse and putting the emphasis in the way that we might often speak. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers. So do you see that the object of this verse is to show that the gifts are persons? It's not so much here the function, although it certainly includes that. And elsewhere, when these gifts are mentioned, [00:14:04] it's particularly the work or the function or the operation of the Holy Spirit that's in view. But here in Ephesians, it's really the persons that are in view. Christ gave certain persons as gifts to the church. And that's what we want to see here. So we have these five, these five types of person listed, and we'll look at them in a little more detail.

But to illustrate what I mean and to emphasize the global aspect that the gift is to the whole body, the whole church, first and foremost, I want us just to look at these three persons. Now, I'm going to speak of a brother that has already been mentioned by our brother Simon, [00:15:02] brother Heicoop from the Netherlands. I understand that he said, it must have been at least once, he said that God has given three great gifts to the church, the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, and John Nelson Darby. Now, why have I mentioned this? Well, firstly, because it illustrates this great point that the gifts spoken of in Ephesians are given, were given to the whole assembly.

And in particular, I couldn't find a picture of the Apostle Paul, so you'll have to make do with a silhouette. And it's probably good that we're not drawn to a person himself. But, you know, when we think of the ministry and the labors and the love and the sacrifice of the Apostle Paul, [00:16:02] I think we can understand what brother Heicoop meant when he said that he was one of the three great gifts given to the church. If we take away the Apostle Paul, and in particular his teaching, what do we have? And, you know, we've already had it this morning. So many Christians, they ignore the teaching of the Apostle Paul. They say, oh, that's just Paul. It's not relevant today. You know, it was just his opinion, and he was biased, or it was just the way that people thought in those days. No. You know, the truth that the Apostle Paul brought out is absolutely fundamental, and we'll see that a little later on. So the gift that God, that Christ gave in sending the Apostle Paul is for the whole church, from the beginning at Pentecost right up until the rapture. We need the teaching that Paul brought out. And it's as important and vital today [00:17:08] as it was when Paul was here, alive, and on earth. And then Martin Luther. You know, what Martin Luther brought out wasn't anything new. It was the truth that the Apostle Paul had already taught and established. It was a matter of the foundations, but it had been lost sight of. Paul's teaching had been ignored, had been replaced with man's thoughts,

with what was outward, and it was a very, very dark period in the age of the church, outwardly. But God gave to the whole church this gift of Martin Luther, who looked again at the scriptures and rediscovered what had always been there for anyone who was willing and able to look, the truths that had [00:18:04] been taught by the Apostle Paul. And the ministry, the teaching of Martin Luther is still relevant today, because he brought out the vital necessity of justification by faith and many other things. And true Christians today, we rely still on the ministry, the results of the gift that Christ gave in giving us Martin Luther. Having said that, in many respects, Martin Luther didn't go far enough, and he went on still with the outward form of the Christian church of that day. So, he still went along with a clergy and laity separation. He still went along within the framework of national churches and a setup which was of man's order. And it was to another great [00:19:11] gift to the church that the recovery of those truths was given, and John Nelson Darby brought out. Again, it wasn't anything new. They'd been taught by the Apostle Paul. They were there from the beginning for all to see, but they'd been lost sight of and not practiced. And he brought to light as speaking the mind of Christ, and we're very thankful. And we, not only we, but Christians who are in the good of many scriptural truths, they owe the understanding of them to John Nelson Darby. So, of these five gifts, we can say that two of them are foundational. They were necessary to be laid at the beginning, and these gifts as men have passed from this scene. We no longer have [00:20:07] these two foundational gifts. We don't have any more apostles and prophets, despite what some might claim. We have no apostles and prophets today. But what they brought out, we very definitely do. And what they taught has been recorded for us in God's word. So, we have the foundations that they themselves brought out. And so, it's absolutely essential that what we build, what we work on, rests on the teaching of these two gifts, the apostles and prophets. Now, we have this little representation here of a workman standing beside a foundation. I suppose most of us are perhaps used to the idea of the foundations of concrete filling a trench, but this illustrates it well [00:21:02] enough. We have here, evidently, concrete foundations with some metal reinforcements, and they're clearly designed to support the rest of the building. And what we see here will then be out of sight. And in many respects, this is a picture, I think, of the work of the Lord Jesus, because in one respect, the foundation of the body, the assembly, it's Christ himself and his work. And his work is finished. It's complete. And his sorrows and sufferings are past. And in that sense, they're out of sight, but they're still there. And they're a necessary basis on which everything else is built. And that's why we still remember the Lord Jesus in this way. So, we have these vital foundations. They're not to be neglected. If you take away the foundations of a building, [00:22:07] then it will fall down. So, it's absolutely essential. And how regrettable it is in Christendom when these foundational truths are neglected or ignored. So, very wonderful that the Lord Jesus loved us so much that he sent these apostles and prophets who have taught us these things on which we rely absolutely. And so, of the list of five, there are three that remain in the sense that we will still have these gifts today and they'll remain right up until the end at the point of the rapture at which time the verses come in where it says, till we all come in the unity of the faith and so on. So, these three persons, [00:23:05] these three gifts are necessary and we would see they're still given to the church as a whole.

And I say that because we must always bear that in mind. Of course, in a practical way, their work has to be done within the context of a local assembly or the expression of the assembly. But let's not forget the importance that they have been given to the whole church. So, we have these three evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. So, let's just look at the work of the evangelist. Very helpfully, we've already had been reminded of the church figure as the house of God, as a building, and that links in very nicely with [00:24:04] the view that I want to bring out here. I'm looking at, of course, 1 Peter 2 verse 5, that each believer, we're described as living stones and each one of us are brought in and together we make up. We're members of the one body. We're each a member and we might

view it, each of us, as a building block in that which God is building for his glory. So, here we have a builder who's bringing, to be used in a building, a stone or a brick or a block. And it's just a little picture for us of the way in which an evangelist, in taking the gospel, the good news of the work of the Lord Jesus, he's preaching that word to those who are unsaved. They're not yet part of the body. They're not a believer on the Lord Jesus. They're not part of the church, but they're [00:25:06] they're lost. They're in the world. But the evangelist, through his gift, brings them in because he presents that which alone can save the person, the work of the Lord Jesus. And having preached the gospel, having led them to Christ, they're now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, they're now a member of the body on the basis of that one baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 at Pentecost. So, this is the view. The work of the evangelist is to bring in the raw material, if I can use it like that, to be brought now to be part of the assembly. Certainly, a local assembly, expression of the local assembly. But there's another important aspect of the evangelist and the work of the evangelist. Now, [00:26:04] I wonder if the young ones know what this is a picture of. The proper description is it's a pair of compasses. Not a compass, a pair of compasses. A compass is what we use to find north and south. But this is a pair of compasses and we use it for drawing a circle. And here, you can see, I don't know if they still use these in schools. They did when I was at school, but that was a long time ago. The point stays in the center and the other leg with the pen or pencil is used to draw a perfect circle. Now, if we think of that circle as representing the whole church of God, the evangelist ought to have one leg in the circle and one leg outside because his sphere of operation is not within the assembly or church, it's outside. It's to those [00:27:04] who are not believers yet. But in preaching to them Christ, the object is that they're not just saved and fit for heaven in some future day. And in the meantime, they can just carry on as they were. No, they're to be brought in a practical way within the bounds of the assembly and in the circle of fellowship where they can enjoy, along with every believer, the privileges and responsibilities of which we've already spoken. So an evangelist isn't a lone agent. He's not out there just doing his own thing. He's sent from Christ and his purpose is to have this vital link between the functioning of the assembly and those who are outside. And that's a very practical thing to bear in mind for the evangelist. So we need to pray for the [00:28:01] evangelist. The evangelist needs to be someone whose interests remain at the heart of the assembly and the person of the Lord Jesus himself. And I'm sure they are. Now, the next gift that one of those remains is the pastor or the shepherd. And my purpose here is not to encroach on a following session, but just to illustrate this, because the gift of a pastor, as the Bible expresses it, is misunderstood in Christendom today, because you'll hear people talk about the pastor of a church as if it's an office or a qualification or a title. And it's not that at all, because the real meaning of a pastor is what we have here, a shepherd. [00:29:03] And if we read 1 Peter 5 verses 2 to 4, we read, in fact, let's look at this next slide, shepherd the flock of God, which is among you, not as lording it over your possessions, but being models for the flock. And when the chief shepherd is manifested, you shall receive the unfading crown of glory. Now, I know this is going to be covered in a later session, but the point here of the pastor or the shepherd is that he's looking after God's flock, the Lord's sheep. They're not his congregation. They're not his possessions. But on the other hand, they're to be an example, a model for the flock. And this verse, the dots that I've omitted, goes on to speak about not doing it for base gain. It's not an occupation. It's not a job. And regrettably, that's how many see this role of the pastor or shepherd, that it's a paid job and they have their [00:30:07] own congregation. But in the context of the whole church, Christ has given brothers who have a shepherd's care for the sheep. And that means the little lamb that needs to be cared for, the young ones, the old sheep that's getting lame, the sheep that goes astray. All these things we can understand by the figure of the sheep and the shepherd. That's the role, the gift of the pastor, the care for his fellow believer. So he's caring for the Lord's sheep. And here we have shepherds and teachers, because it seems to me to be quite clear that the gift of these two are often linked together. The scripture speaks of pastors and teachers, because an [00:31:03] important part of caring for the

sheep is being able to understand and teach the Lord's sheep.

It's being able to understand and teach God's word. The two are very closely linked. Now, I suppose a brother can be a gifted teacher and not necessarily have a pastoral, practical ministry. And there may be a brother who's very tenderly able to care for one another and may not be able to teach in the way that someone who has the gift of teaching does. But more often than not, I suggest that we do find these two gifts in the same person, because they're so both needful and they're in a very happy balance. So here we have, in either case, the illustration shows that the brick or the block that the evangelist has brought [00:32:06] in is now being fitted in and cared for in the building, the house of God. I'm not quite sure what this brick layer is. He seems to be using a tin of paint to stick the bricks together. But anyway, the brick has its place and it's to be in line with the rest of the building. And there, you know, we need to be subject to God's word. We need to fit in one with another. And this is all the work of the shepherd and the teacher. That which is a result, the testimony to the assembly of God is in accord with the principles of godliness.

And so the object of all these gifts are here in verse 12, for the perfecting of the saints, [00:33:01] for the work of the ministry and for the edifying of the body of Christ. That's the object in view. Just a little word on the difference between natural ability and gift. If we read Matthew 25 verse 15, we see there the Lord giving talents, each distributing according to the different abilities. And Christ gives different gifts to each one according to what their natural abilities are. And this is not an accidental thing, because of course God made us, each one, how we are. And if God gave somebody a particular quality, then God makes sure that the spiritual gift that's given to him or her is appropriate to how that person is. But the two are not identical. Talents are not exactly the same as gifts, because if you read [00:34:05] Matthew 25, you find that the wicked servant, who also was given a talent, is cast out into outer darkness. So there we see that, you know, God will take account of those natural abilities given to each one. Even the unbeliever, they still have God-given qualities, and they will be responsible to give an account to the Lord as to how they've used those talents. Did they use them for God's glory or for their own gain? But the same principle applies to the matter of spiritual gifts. Christ distributes gifts in wisdom according to the natural abilities that God has given to us when we were made. And I might just quote the beloved, late beloved Dr. Patterson, when he referred to a brother who was gifted with great natural intellect. Very, very intelligent [00:35:04] brother, but he said he was almost untouched by his gift. And his great intellect took him away from the things of God. And Dr. Patterson's expression was this. His great intellect, he said, it slew him. And that's a very solemn thing to bear in mind, that spiritual gifts were to be touched and affected by our spiritual gifts. It's no good our saying one thing and expecting everyone else to follow if we're not ourselves touched by our gifts. So that's something to bear in mind. There are dangers in the gifts. The Corinthians were examples of this. They had every gift, and yet they were puffed up. They were like children showing off the toys that they had, [00:36:03] and they were just happy to show off their gifts, but they'd forgotten that there was an object in view to Christ giving these gifts to the assembly. It's not to draw attention to ourselves, but to build up the church. It's to build up that which is for Christ. And so we need to bear these things in mind. Again, we haven't much time to look at a lot of the details of these things. There are many reasons why we may lack gifts, and you can look at those as listed in the notes. I just want to perhaps spend more time on this matter, hindrances. We've already spoken of man-made arrangements, and if we have a system where instead of coming together on the basis of the scriptures that there is one body, and that we're all members of one body, and that Christ is in [00:37:05] the center, and that the Holy Spirit should be free to operate, if Christians don't gather on that basis, then it's a hindrance to the gifts that have been given. And an example of this might be the distinction between clergy and laity having appointed preachers and pastors. Of course, we need to

bear in mind, it might be easy for us to look outside and to see the failings of others, but we need to be careful ourselves. And I'm sure the conveners of this conference even, it's a matter of exercise for them when they invite brothers to give a session and to set out what should be presented, that they bear in mind the gifts of God. And so, you know, these things, they come down even to us in our gatherings and the way we seek to operate. [00:38:06] Well, again, in 1 Corinthians 14, we've, brother Simon mentioned of brother X over here, brother Y over here, and, you know, the apostle has to speak to the Corinthians of their disorder. Regrettably, this can be seen in Christendom today, many people participating all at once, and it's a matter of disorder. So there are many hindrances that might practically limit the proper workings of the gifts that Christ has given. Well, we're running out of time for much more, but just to leave on this slide, and I won't say much because it is going to be covered by another brother later on, but the whole object, the motive of the exercise of all gift is what is brought out in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. The Corinthians, they had every gift, but what they lacked was the object was for the [00:39:08] benefit of others, not to draw attention to themselves. And so every gift should be exercised out of love, one for another, and most of all, out of love for the Lord Jesus, the one who gave gifts to the whole assembly.