

Eph 4:7–12 (ESV) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁽⁸⁾ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁽⁹⁾ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ⁽¹⁰⁾ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ⁽¹¹⁾ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ⁽¹²⁾ to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

1. The essence of Christianity is not what we do for God but what he's done for us

- A. All of the commands in the OT and NT are important and need to be obeyed
 - 1). But that can only happen because of God's work – his gracious provision
 - a). We have been saved by grace – Eph 2:8-9
 - b). The desire and ability to obey is all by grace – Phil 2:13
 - 2). Therefore when we obey it is not to be saved or to sustain our salvation
 - a). It is evidence that God's grace is active in us – that he has done a saving work in us
Titus 2:14 He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, *eager to do good works*.
 - 1a). We are eager to do good works because he did a good work in us first
 That zeal to serve him then is evidence that has taken place

Transition: That is what this passage is all about – God's work in our life

- A. God who calls us into serve him – who has given us the desire to serve him – and the power to serve
 - 1). Now this passage – He ALSO provides the giftedness we need to do that effectively
- B. Paul starts by saying all of us have been given gifts to serve God
 - 1). Then focuses in on certain gifts given to certain individuals to bless the church

2. Outline

- A. Every believer is gifted by grace
- B. How Christ won the right to give those gifts to every believer
- C. The gifted believers given to the church

I. EVERY BELIEVER IS GIFTED BY GRACE

Eph 4:7 (ESV) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

1. "But" is a word introducing a contrast of what went before

- A. V. 3-6 spoke of the incredible unity the body has – the *oneness* we enjoy
Eph 4:3-6 (NIV) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (4) There is *one* body and *one* Spirit-- just as you were called to *one* hope when you were called-- (5) *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism; (6) *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- B. Now the contrast in v. 7 – we are "one" but we are not robots – there is an a great diversity in the body
 - 1). We are not robots – automatons walking in lockstep with one another
 - 2). All have God as our heavenly Father – but each one of us has a personal relationship with him
 - 3). All are united in the purposes of God – but each one is called to a different way to live that out
 - 4). All have the same Spirit – but each one is gifted in an individual way – *a diversity of gifts*

Point: There is a great unity and diversity in the body of Christ

But GRACE was given

1. It's important to realize that Christ gives spiritual gifts to his people by grace

- A. If it wasn't by grace we wouldn't have any gifts – because we still fall short daily
 - 1). But grace gives not because the recipient deserves it
 It is unmerited favor that gives to those who don't deserve it

Thought: Let me rephrase that – God does give based on merit – but not our merit – Christ's

A. This is what is staggering about Christianity – God sees us through the perfection of Christ

1). He sees us through His flawless compliance with the law

Ro 5:19 (ESV) For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

a). Righteous = 100% compliance to God's law

b). When God sees you – he sees you clothed in the robes of Christ righteousness

1a). Christ earned all the blessings from God for you

Ro 5:19 (ESV) For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

2a). I stand before God as one who has never broken the law

B. Let me throw this in for your comfort – this one's for free - this is how all the promises become ours

2 Co 1:20 (ESV) For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.

1). I love this – all the answers to the promises come into our life because of him

a). If it weren't so none of the promises would be for me – I don't deserve those blessings

b). But I go to God and say "Father I thank you that you promised this or that – and I know you're a God who cannot lie. Therefore, I trust that is going to happen because Christ earned that YES for me."

1a). I look away to Christ's perfection and base my confidence on that!

2a). The minute I look at myself all the confidence seeps away

Point: It is all by grace – including the gifts we receive to serve God and each other

A. It all flows into our life because of the perfection of Christ – given to us in spite of our failures

Transition: So all of the gifts come into our life by grace

A. But we all have a different measure – or portion of gifting – next point

Eph 4:7 (ESV) But grace was *given to each one of us according to the measure* of Christ's gift.

1. We're talking about diversity

A. Paul says each of us have been given a measure or portion of gifting

1). He calls it Christ's gift – singular – it may be a single gift or a blend of many gifts

a). The point is – it is different for each one of us

B. If you're interested you'll find the list of spiritual gifts in Rom 12:6–8, 1 Cor 12:8–10, Eph 4:11

2. Some thoughts on the gifts

A. These lists are not shopping lists – I want this one – that one GIVING – NO!

1). Listen if God gives you the gift of giving you'll love to give!

2). We are all commanded to give – but the one with this gift will have an unusual generosity

B. God sovereignly customizes the blend of giftedness we all have so we can accomplish the purposes he's planned for us

1). So your blending of gifts will perfectly match your divinely ordained purpose

2). And even though you may have the same gift as another it will vary to match that purpose

a). Example: The gift of teaching

1a). One will be gifted for adults – another for children (did VBS discovered NOT ME)

2a). One will be gifted at teaching one-on-one – Albert in Philippines

3a). Another's teaching comes out with counseling

C. One thing about gifts – you enjoy doing what God has gifted you in

1). I joked about "Giving" – if your gifted with giving – you'll love to give

- 2). Some say being a eunuch – not marrying is a gift from God – NOOOOOO!!!
 - a). If you have this gift you'll have no desire to get married! Stop panicking!

3. We won't look any deeper at the individual gifts found in Scripture

- A. That isn't what this passage is about – it is speaking about the uniqueness of every believer
 - 1). We couldn't be more united – but we live that unity out with great diversity
 - 2). By grace God has given you a different set/blending of gifts than he gave to me
 - a). You have people with the gift of administration – they don't mind a stack of paperwork
Hand me a stack of legal documents – 5 minutes in I'm asking the Lord to take me home
 - b). I used to feel guilty until I figured out different giftings
Most teaching pastors aren't gifted at administration – fortunately God sends those who are
- B. This also means no Christian can replace another in God's plan – we are not interchangeable – why?
 - 1). Because each one of us is gifted for a specific purpose
I can't do what you do as effectively as you – you can't replace me
 - a). When you or I fail to fulfill your purposes God's work will suffer
You have somebody doing double duty – who is not gifted for that task like you are
 - b). This is why no believer is to be a spectator – why every believer is strategic in God's plan

Transition: That brings us to an interesting section with many different opinions

- A. Paul is going to specify some specific gifts in v. 11 – not for everybody but for certain individuals
 - 1). But before he does that he shows how Christ received the right to bestow those gifts

II. HOW CHRIST WON THE RIGHT TO GIVE GIFTS TO EVERY BELIEVER

Eph 4:8–10 (ESV) Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”⁽⁹⁾ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?⁽¹⁰⁾ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

1. Paul is quoting Psalm 68 – using it as an analogy of Christ's work

- A. Psalm 68 is a composed by David to celebrate Israel's triumph over her enemies
- B. After Israelite Kings won victory's they'd take spoils and prisoners and parade them before the people
 - 1). They would work their way through Jerusalem and then ascend Mount Zion
 - a). As they were going they would give gifts to the cheering crowds
- C. Also featured in this parade would be those who were taken captive but had been rescued

Transition: Paul takes this and uses it to refer to Christ

- A. It's an illustration – an analogy of what Christ did
 - 1). His great victory over the hosts of hell, his ascension into heaven, his giving of gifts

He Ascended and Descended

1. He ascended on high

- A. Paul uses this ascent of the Israel King up Mount Zion after victory in battle
To illustrate Christ ascent into glory after his victory on earth
 - 1). In His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus Christ conquered Satan, sin, and death
 - 2). The proof that he had done so is the resurrection – the ascent - isn't it
 - a). If 100% of the sin placed into his account wasn't paid for – he can't go into heaven
The resurrection is a receipt that says Paid in Full – what is paid – the debt for our sin!

2. He descended into the lower regions of the earth

- A. Provides a striking contrast showing extreme range of our Lord's condescension and exaltation

- 1). The one who was far above all the heavens descended to the lower regions of earth

Question: What are the lower regions (parts) of the earth?

- A. As you trace this phrase through the Scriptures – you'll find

- 1). It has to do with death (Ps. 63:9)

It refers to the belly of the great fish Jonah was kept in (Matt 12:40)

It also speaks of the created earth, the mountains, forests and trees (Is 44:23)

And the womb of a woman where God is forming a child (Psa. 139:15)

- B. In referring to the depth of the descent in the incarnation

- 1). Jesus stepped out of eternity – entered time – by coming to earth - this place of life and death

Transition: I know you're all thinking - it also means something else

2. Jesus descended into the very pit of the demons – “Sheol” the place of the dead

Peter helps us TURN: 1 Pe 3:18–19 (ESV) For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, *being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ⁽¹⁹⁾ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison,*

- A. Between Jesus' death and resurrection – he was very active

He was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.”

- 1). As His body lay for three days in that tomb (physically dead) he was very active spiritually

- 2). What was he doing in the spiritual realm during that time?

He *descended “and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison.”*

- 3). This does not refer to preaching the gospel (from *euangelizō*)

- a). Some teach those who die outside of Christ will have a second chance to hear the Gospel, believe and be saved – WRONG!

- b). This was the premise of Rob Bell's best seller – “love wins” = an empty hell

Heb 9:27 (ESV) And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

Question: If Christ wasn't preaching the Gospel, what was he doing?

- A. He was announcing his victory – his triumph over Satan, the demons and hell

- 1). Even while they were trying to hold him in death

- 2). He was proclaiming the truth of Col 2:15

Col 2:15 (ESV) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

- a). Before he ascended into heaven he was letting them know the war was over

He had won! The demons were all subject to him

Transition: That leaves us with a tricky portion that has many opinions

Eph 4:8 (ESV) Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives...

NASB “He led captive a host of captives”

1. Some believe Jesus went into paradise – Abraham's paradise – Luke 16

- A. Abraham's bosom – was located next to Sheol

- B. This teaching states the OT Saints could not go into heaven until Christ paid for their sins on the cross

- 1). Because the animal sacrifices in the OT couldn't remove sin only cover it

Heb 10:4 (ESV) For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

- 2). Therefore Christ proclaimed his triumph over Satan, the demons and hell

- a). Then went next door to Abraham's bosom (paradise) and gathered up those waiting saints

- b). Like the victorious kings of old, He recaptured the captives and liberated them, and took them into glory with him in this wonderful procession – he led a host of captives

- C. There are some problems with that view – so not all believe that – they didn't in England
Gen 5:24 (NIV) Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.
- 1). This was after the fall – I don't think God took him down into paradise – but up into his presence
Elijah is the real problem: 2 Ki 2:11 (ESV) And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. *And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.*
 - 1). Not down into Paradise but *up into heaven*
- Question:** How can that be if his sins weren't removed?
- A. The solution for OT saints in heaven would be they were saved on credit
 - 1). God looking forward to the cross – and seeing the payment by Christ
 Was able to accept them into heaven – applying that payment beforehand
 - B. Those who believe this would say the parable of Abraham's bosom
 Was an illustration– Jesus was not teaching an actual location next to Sheol – that people could see into
 - 3a). I lean to this because I can't get past Elijah being in heaven before the cross
- Thought:** Those are the two main thoughts – I'll leave it up to you to figure out
- A. It's peripheral and NOT really what the point of this section is about
 - B. **The point:** Paul is explaining that Jesus paid the ultimate price of coming to earth and suffering death
 - 1). And that qualified him to be exalted above all the heaven = ruling all things
Phil 2:6-9 (NIV) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! (9) Therefore (because he humbled himself – was obedient by going to the cross) *God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*
 - a). To the highest place – or Eph 4 “Far above the heavens”
 - 2). By that victory He gained the right to rule His church and give gifts to His church
Eph 4:8 (ESV) Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, *and he gave gifts to men.*”
- Transition:** He gives to every believer – he also gives specific gifts to the church – gifted individuals
- A. Because of time we'll only see the first one today – pick up the others next week
 - 1). I want to look at it because there is quite a bit of confusion

III. THE GIFTED BELIEVERS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

Eph 4:11–12 (ESV) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ⁽¹²⁾ to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

Apostles

1. Want to spend time here because many are giving themselves this title today

- A. Let's investigate what Apostle meant – to see if this can be true

2. The Apostle defined

- A. Simple in the Greek = One that is sent by another - can be translated "Messenger"
 - 1). Some have ran with this simple meaning and placed this title on modern men
 "Has a powerful message - obviously sent by God to the church - He is an Apostle"
- B. We must see that the NT takes this word and radically elevates it above its normal meaning
 - 1). The NT Apostle was far more than a simple messenger
 He held the highest office in the church and was a very unique individual

3. The uniqueness of the Apostle

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- A. Each one was commissioned personally by Jesus into this office
 - 1). The calling didn't come from man it came directly and personally from Christ
Ga 1:1 (ESV) Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, *but through Jesus Christ...*
 - a). Paul was saying – I meet that requirement
 - B. Each one had seen the risen Lord personally
 - 1). Essential because they were called to be witnesses of a living Savior to begin the church
 - 2). It would have been impossible if they had only had a second-hand experience
 - a). Why the Lord came to Paul powerfully and personally – Paul met that requirement
 - C. Their writings and teachings were fully inspired by God - NO ERRORS at all
 - 1). When they spoke or wrote these were not words of men BUT WORDS OF GOD Himself
 - 2). Before the NT was written they were in a sense the Bible to the church
 - a). God's will came through them to His people
 - b). Now that the NT is completed we no longer need this
 - 3). This one alone removes any possibility of modern day Apostles
 - a). There is nobody today who has perfect – divine revelation
 I don't care what Kenneth Copeland says about his Rhema knowledge
 - 1a). He hears directly from God so don't question him – ridiculous
 - D. These men were also gifted with working miracles whenever that was necessary
 - 1). This was meant to validate their message because it was new and radical
 - a). God worked miracles through them to give evidence they were sent by him
 - b). Again we have the completed NT this is no longer necessary
- Point:** When you look at how the NT elevates this term Apostle - Can't see how there can be any today
- A. I have discovered that any ministry calling it's leader Apostle is way off in many places
 - 1). I haven't seen one yet that is not heretical somewhere
 - 2). When I hear Apostle so-and-so my ears perk up and I keep my distance
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CONCLUSION

1. We are united in an incredible oneness – yet we are distinct

- A. We have one purpose – yet God has given each of us our own way to work that out
 - 1). He has placed us in our own sphere of influence to work those purposes out
 He has gifted us with our own unique blend of gifts to be effective
 - 2). It's our job to be sensitive to his leading – to work all that out into our lives
- B. We saw this all comes to us by grace – unmerited favor given to us
 - 1). But not totally unmerited giving by God – Christ merited everything we enjoy
 - a). God's acceptance – glory – the yes to promises - gifting

2. That brings us to our time of communion

- A. We saw how Christ descended to earth – that is what we remember this morning
 - 1). The leaving of glory – to descend to earth to enter into the despair of man
 - 2). Then the grace that flowed out from the work of the cross to each of us
 - a). If you know him today – then you are a recipient of great love – great grace – great mercy
 - b). You have not been saved because you are good – you've been saved because he is
 You have not been saved because of how wonderful you perform as a Christian
 You are saved because he is perfect and God graciously views you through that
- B. Let's sing a song – have the ushers pass out the elements

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- C. **THE BREAD** – speaks of Christ's body bruised and broken for you
- 1). He knew what descending to earth meant – the suffering not only on the cross but before
 - a). His love for those he created was great enough to drive him – compel him to come
- D. **THE CUP** – speaks of the shed blood that gained our forgiveness
- Heb 9:22 (ESV)** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.
- 1). As his blood flowed out of his veins it had an amazing effect
 - a). It was wiping our record of sins clean – until there is nothing left
 - 2). For those who are in Christ – God's law can scan the entirety of your life
And it will find nothing to accuse you over
 - a). You stand before God legally as if you have never sinned once
- Ro 8:1 (ESV)** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.