

Grace to Each One
Ephesians 4:7-10
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“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says,

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”*

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)” – Ephesians 4:7-10, ESV

Introduction: Diversity within our Unity

If I were to tell you that someone has given you a significant gift, you might immediately have several questions:

1. What is it and who is it from?
2. How is it being given to me? Or How was it decided to give it to me?
3. How was the giver able to give it to me? – especially if it was a really significant gift
4. What did it cost the giver?
5. Why did the giver want to give it to me?

Last week, we saw the importance and strength of the unity God has created within His church. The unity God creates in the church is not an organizational unity or an absolute uniformity, but it is a unity of the faith and hope and worship we share of the one true, Triune God.

As we transition from the seven-fold unity of verses 4-6 into verse 7, we see that God’s vision for the unity of His people is a real, substantial unity that also includes true diversity. The unity is grounded in the truth of the Gospel and even in the very nature and character of our Triune God Himself, whereas the diversity is embodied in the differing gifts God gives His people within His kingdom.

I. Grace Given to Each One – *What has been given?*

Paul opens this section in verse 7 by saying, *“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”*

A. The Grace Given to Each One

Now this “grace” that Paul speaks of in verse 7 is a different aspect of grace than the grace of salvation that Paul described in chapter 2. When, in 2:8, Paul said, “For by grace you have been saved through faith . . .”, he was talking about the grace of salvation, which is essentially the same for every believer. We are saved by God’s favor and kindness through faith in Jesus Christ.

But God’s grace does not just save us, it also equips us for service in His kingdom. And as God’s grace equips us, it does so in different ways – “to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” This is an individually measured and appointed grace.

The Greek word for grace is *charis* and the term for spiritual gifts is *charisma*. We use the term “charisma” to describe someone who is particularly charming or, we might even say, one who has a gracious manner of speaking, engaging and convincing. But the Bible uses the term *charisma* to describe the gifts God gives His people by His grace, as in 1 Corinthians 12:7: “There are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit.” The distinction between grace itself (*charis*) and the gifts of grace (*charisma*) is a subtle one and here in Ephesians 4:7, Paul is using the term grace – “grace was given to each one” – to describe the gifts God gives us each individually.

We use the word “favor” similarly, though in a much more trivial way. We say, “He has shown me great favor.” And we say “Can you do me a favor?” So, favor can mean kind regard or it can mean something done or given out of kind regard.

B. The Diversity of the Grace Given to Each One

“Each one” emphasizes the personal and individual nature of the gifts of grace God gives. Different people have tried to make comprehensive lists of spiritual gifts based on the lists given in the Bible, but such an exercise is impossible. Here, in Ephesians, Paul doesn’t give us a list at all. In 1 Corinthians 12, which we heard earlier, Paul gives us two lists, one in verses 8-10 and another in verse 28. In Romans 12, a different list is given. But Paul did not intend for any of these to be comprehensive.

Perhaps the most helpful list is given in 1 Peter 4:10-11 – “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Here Peter just names two types of gifts: speaking and serving, or we might say, talking and doing. Some might be preachers and others teachers and others powerful intercessors – all of these involve speaking – while others might be gifted administrators, servers, compassion-showers, hospitality-extendors, etc.

When we think about the various ways God has gifted His people to speak and to serve, we need to avoid two common errors: One is judging others because their gifts are different from ours or

are perceived to not be as valuable. That's Paul's main point in I Cor. 12. But the other is avoiding a responsibility or an opportunity to minister God's grace because "we're not gifted in that way." We need to remember that if God calls us to minister in some way, He can equip us with whatever is needed to do it.

But the Bible is clear in Ephesians, I Corinthians, Romans and I Peter that everyone who is a true Christian has been gifted by God's grace working through the Holy Spirit to serve the body of Christ, to minister God's grace in its various forms. This is powerful and individual and gracious and wonderful. It shows how God loves us, each individually. He doesn't just rescue us from sin and death, but He also gifts us individually and uses us to serve up His grace to others – whether that's by making the food, setting up the chairs, playing the music, preaching the word, teaching Sunday school, hosting a Bible study, laboring in intercessory prayer, keeping the books straight, making wise decisions for the leadership of the church, etc. In various ways, "*grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*"

C. The Measure of the Grace Given to Each One – *How has it been given?*

The grace that God gives individually to each one of us should help make us feel loved, valued, significant, even vital to God's kingdom work. But it should also humble us and help us keep things in their proper perspective. The grace given to each of us is "given . . . according to the measure of Christ's gift." This means we did not give ourselves the gift, we did not choose our gift, nor did we choose how much of our gift we would have.

If Christ is the King of His kingdom and if He measures out the grace-gifts of His people as He sees fit, then we cannot either boast or despair over our gift. Those who seem especially gifted are not responsible for their own gifts, and those who seem lacking in giftedness have indeed been given their gifts from Christ by the grace of God and for His glory.

This also teaches us that we are accountable to Christ for how we use our gifts. What counts is not what type of gift we've been given or how much of our gift we've been given but how we use what we're given. This is the point of the parable of the talents that Jesus told:

The servant who had been given five talents and the servant who had been given two were both commended not because of how much they had been given but because of what they did with what they had, whether it was five talents or two. They lovingly served their master and invested their talents for His kingdom, and they were commended and rewarded. The servant who buried his single talent was not rebuked for having only a single talent but because he had a wrong view of the master and buried his talent instead of investing it.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God has graciously given you abilities to serve Christ's kingdom and to bless others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. No one is left out, Each one has received grace, given according to the measure of Christ's gift. The best way to know your gift and use it well is to pray and look around you for opportunities to serve, to reach out, to pray,

to help. God gifts you for service in His kingdom, not for the sake of simply having a gift and keeping it to yourself. Look for ways to invest:

1. Share the Gospel with a friend or neighbor who doesn't know Jesus.
2. Pray for the salvation of a lost loved one.
3. Support missionaries taking the Gospel to the nations.
4. Pray for our church daily.
5. Serve others in your neighborhood.
6. Help out with the ministries of the church.
7. Think of ways we can reach our neighbors and help organize and lead them.
8. Host women's ministry or a Bible study in your home.
9. Host a monthly fellowship event or plan one to do together somewhere.
10. Give someone a book or a CD that might bless or encourage them.
11. Invite someone to church or to a fellowship event.

The opportunities to speak and serve are as varied as the grace gifts God gives and the circumstances in which we can use them.

II. Grace Given from the Ascended Christ the Lord – *How was Christ able to give?*

After telling us that we have each been given a gift, Paul quotes Psalm 68 in explaining how it is that Christ is able to give these gifts in verse 8:

Therefore it says,

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”*

A. The Victor and His Spoils

Psalm 68 is a victory psalm of the triumph of God which opens with these lines:

*“God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered;
and those who hate him shall flee before him!
As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away” – Ps. 68:1-2*

Paul quotes from verse 18, and the full context of the quote is clearly one of victorious triumph:

*The chariots of God are twice ten thousand,
thousands upon thousands;
the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary.
You ascended on high,
leading a host of captives in your train*

*and receiving gifts among men,
even among the rebellious, that the Lord God may dwell there.*

*Blessed be the Lord,
who daily bears us up;
God is our salvation. Selah
Our God is a God of salvation,
and to God, the Lord, belong deliverances from death. (vv. 17-20)*

Now there seems to be a key difference between what Psalm 68:18 says and how Paul quotes it. Psalm 68:18 says, “receiving gifts among men” or “receiving gifts from men.” Paul renders the quotation to say “he gave gifts to men.” Is Paul playing loose with Scripture or is he quoting from memory and making a mistake?

No, it’s not either of these things. The picture portrayed in Psalm 68 is of a victorious king, and a king who has won a great battle gathers the spoils of war in order to distribute them to his people. So, while the verb in Psalm 68:18 is best translated as “receiving,” everyone in the ancient world understood this to be a receiving that would also be a giving – bringing in and handing out – and two of the oldest translation traditions of the Hebrews Scriptures render the verb as “giving.” So, we could say that Psalm 68:18 is focused on one side of the action, while Paul renders it in such a way that draws attention to the other side of the same action.

It’s a powerful picture, especially when we see it as pointing to Christ. How does the LORD win His great victory over His enemies? How does God ascend in victorious triumph over His foes? According to Paul, it happens when Christ rises from the dead and then ascends into heaven. In the ascension of Christ to the right hand of the Throne of Majesty on High, far above all earthly powers and above every ruler and every name that is named. In the exaltation of Christ in His ascension, we see God’s victory and Christ receives the spoils of war to distribute them to His people.

Specifically, we can see in the church that the prize that Christ wins for His people is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes and distributes His gifts to all.

B. The Cost of the Victory – What did it cost Christ to give us these gifts?

Right after telling us about Christ’s victory and the gifts He gives from the victory, Paul reminds us of the cost of that victory, in verse 9:

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth?

This verse is actually pretty tricky to translate correctly and clearly. The ESV follows most of the English versions in rendering this as a rhetorical question. But many other English versions don’t say “the lower regions, the earth” but the lower parts or regions of the earth.

If we could summarize briefly, we can see that verse 9 describes the humiliation of Christ and then verse 10 describes His exaltation. Paul reminds us of how far down Christ descended before he tells us of how high up Christ has been exalted. It's a reminder that the victorious ascension did not come without a cost, which is why I personally prefer the rendering of "the lower parts of the earth," because I think Paul is describing Christ's humiliation all the way to the grave.

Christ had to lose everything in order to win the victory for us over our enemies and to secure the spoils of victory to give to us:

- First He lost the glories of heaven and the glory He shared with His Father from eternity.
- Then, He lost His friends and followers, being betrayed by one of His closest followers, denied three times by another and abandoned by all others, who scattered into the shadows when He was arrested.
- Then, He lost His dignity and justice as He was cruelly beaten, mocked, condemned, stripped and crucified.
- Then He lost fellowship and His relationship with His Father as He was made sin for us and the wrath of God was poured out upon Him.
- Then, He lost His life as He breathed His last and was taken down from the cross and laid in a cold, dark tomb. That's "the lower parts of the earth," the grave, which represents the end of His humiliation, when He had lost everything to pay the price for our sin and our salvation.

III. Grace Given for a Purpose – *Why was the gift given?*

But then once Jesus had satisfied the justice of God due to us for sin, He defeated sin and then defeated death by rising again from the death with the power of unquenchable life. And not only that, but once He was raised again, He was exalted to the highest place. And so "*He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.*")"

A. That He Might Fill All Things

Here Paul brings out not just Christ's exaltation but also the purpose for His exaltation: "That he might fill all things." We should see this purpose "that He might fill all things" as directly connected to the purpose of God expressed back in 1:9-10, which Paul described as: "*the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*"

So Christ fills all things and unites all things, thus fulfilling the purpose of God for the world. But what does this mean? Some have taken this as a statement of universalism, a claim that everyone and everything will be redeemed and brought together in Christ. But we cannot interpret this in a way that would directly contradict with other clear teaching of Scripture that the enemies of God will be condemned to hell, along with Satan and his demons. In fact, Psalm 68 itself, which Paul

quotes and which has such wonderful language about the victory of God has equally powerful language about the humiliating defeat of the enemies of God, including those who rebel against Him.

Rather than seeing here an absolute universalism, which is unbiblical, it is better to see that Christ is exalted to rule over all things and all things are filled by His glory, His sovereignty, His justice, His reign. In the beginning, man was created by God to rule over all of His creation and to fill it with the righteousness and justice of God. When man fell into sin and slavery to Satan and death, this purpose of God for man was frustrated. But Jesus, when He conquered sin and death restored this purpose of man in Himself. He remains fully man forever and He reigns over all of God's creation in perfect righteousness and justice, and so He fulfills the purpose of God in Himself.

B. That He Might Fill All Things Through Us

And yet, by grace, He does not fulfill the purposes of God by Himself. He gives us gifts and calls us into His service that He might fill all things through us. By calling us and gifting us, Jesus invites us to be the instruments through whom He will bring the nations into His kingdom and under His rule.

Through the preaching of the Gospel, we are commissioned to disciple the nations, to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, that God might gather a people for Himself from among every tribe, tongue, people and nation on the face of the earth. And He uses each one of us and each of the gifts He has given us to do this!

Conclusion: The Strength and Purpose of Diversity

And this brings us to the strength and purpose of our diversity. Christ is the Lord of all the nations and in the end, He will be worshipped and glorified in every tongue by every peoples on the earth. The strength and purpose of our diversity is to empower us to carry out His great commission and to bring the Gospel to the nations and to bring God's people from among the nations to Him.

God needs preachers and teachers and evangelists to do this, but He needs more than just preachers and teachers and evangelists. He has brought together a diverse array of people from a variety of backgrounds – highly educated and barely educated, eloquent and articulate and hard-working and faithfully serving, preaching and teaching and giving and serving, some introverted and some extroverted, some quiet and some exuberant – but all committed to the same Gospel of the same Kingdom and to the glory of the same King and to His worship throughout the whole earth!