

**THE STUDY OF EPHESIANS**  
**LESSON 12 NOTES**  
**EPHESIANS 4:7-11**  
**THE GIFTS OF CHRIST**

Paul has been describing the foundation of church unity and explaining the chief reasons for maintaining it. It is not an optional extra, but part our calling. We do not create it—it is the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But since it is a unity we experience we must seek to sustain it—not by self-promotion but by self-denial (Phil. 2:1-16).

There is another aspect to this unity. The church is one body, and every member is to strive to keep the oneness and unity of the Spirit. But believers are not only unified, they are diversified. There are differences between believers. What are those differences? They are gifts, special abilities given by God that are to be used to strengthen believers, to reach the world, and to minister to the people of the world. Spiritual gifts given by God are the subject of the present passage. The believer is to walk through life using the gifts God has given him.

**THE GIFTS OF CHRIST TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS**

It is important to note that the term **but**, in which verse 7 begins, could be translated “in spite of that” or “on the other hand,” contrasting the previous subject matter with what is about to be said. The interpretation of **but** brings together the emphasis of unity that has been the theme of verses 3-6 with the parallel emphasis of diversity, which is the theme of verses 7-11. Unity is not uniformity and is perfectly consistent with diversity of gifts. God’s gracious relation to “all” is also a personal relation to **each one** and a personal ministry through each one. Thus Paul moves from the unity of believers to the uniqueness of believers.

**Grace** is a single-word definition of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of God’s grace to sinful mankind. The nature of grace is giving, and the Bible tells us much more about giving than getting, because God’s nature is to give. God is a God of grace because He is a God who freely gives. It has nothing to do with anything we have done or have failed to do; it can only be received.

When God “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4), He did so out of pure grace and not for anything He saw in us that made us worthy of His care. All God can see in the world is sin, yet He gave Himself to that sinful world through His own Son in order that the world might be redeemed (John 3:16). The Son also gave Himself, emptying Himself of His own glory that He might offer glory to fallen men and giving His own life that spiritually dead men might live.

The grace in which we stand (Rom. 5:2), not only saves but enables (Phil. 4:13), and that is the sense of the term here. Paul makes it clear that **grace was given** to every believer. The definite article (he) is used in the original text, indicating that this is the grace, the grace unique to

Christ. This distinction is clear for the rest of Paul's statement, ***according to the measure of Christ's gift***. Enabling grace is measured out to be consistent with what is necessary for the operation of Christ's gift.

Each believer's gift is unique. The measure or specific portion given is by sovereign design from the Head of the church. The Lord has measured out the exact proportion of each believer's gift (4:7) and *"God has allotted to each a measure of faith"* (Rom. 12:3). The exact proportion of enabling grace on the part of God is linked with the exact proportion of enacting faith on the part of each believer; and God is the source of both. The sum of this is that God gives both the grace and the faith to energize whatever gift He gives to the full intent of His purpose.

It is clear that since the gifts are sovereignly given (1 Cor. 12:4-7), no gifts should be sought; and since they are essential elements in God's plan (1 Cor. 12:18), no gifts should be unused; and since they come from the Lord, no gifts should be exalted (Rom. 12:3). We each have a gift that is measured out to us—with certain distinct capabilities, parameters, and purposes. Each of us is given a specific gift through which we are to minister in Christ's name. *"As each one has received a special gift,"* Peter says, *"employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God"* (1 Pet. 4:10).

Believers' gifts are not determined by their preferences, inclinations, natural abilities, merit, or any other personal consideration, but solely by God's sovereign and gracious will. We are gifted according to His plan, His purpose, and His measure. We have no more to do with determining our gift than we did with determining what color of skin, hair, or eyes we would be born with. God is the source of electing grace, equipping grace, and enabling grace.

Christians are not assembly-line productions, with every unit being exactly like every other unit. Consequently, no Christian can replace another in God's plan. He has His own individualized plan for each of us and has individually gifted us accordingly. Each of His gifts is exactly what we need to fulfill our work for Him. We never get the wrong gift, or too much or too little of it. When the Holy Spirit gave us our gift, He presented us with precisely the right blend of abilities and enablement we need to serve God. Not only does our unique giftedness make us an irreplaceable member of Christ's Body but it is a mark of God's great love to single each of us out for unique blessing and ministry.

Not to use our gift is an affront to God's wisdom, a rebuff of His love and grace, and a loss to His church. We did not determine our gift, deserve it, or earn it. But we all have a gift from the Lord, and if we do not use it, His work is weakened and His heart is grieved.

## **HOW CHRIST BECAME THE GIVER OF ALL GIFTS**

Paul tells us some of the gifts Christ has given, but before mentioning specific gifts given to the whole church, he uses Psalm 68:18 as a comparison passage to show how Christ received the right to bestow those gifts. The obvious differences between both the Hebrew and Greek (Septuagint) Old Testament texts of Psalm 68:18 and Paul's illustration of it suggest that he is

probably making only a general allusion to the passage for the sake of analogy, rather than specifically identifying it as a direct prediction of Christ.

In the ancient world a conquering general might have been given a “triumph” in honor of his victories. He would ride through the capital city of his country in a procession—often followed by a vast number of prisoners of war, and his own people, having been freed from prison. Chariots and horses would follow, carrying the booty of his victory. Following the triumphal procession celebratory gifts, the spoils from his victories would be distributed.

The phrase **when He ascended on high** depicts a triumphant Christ returning from battle on earth back into the glory of the heavenly city with the trophies of His great victory.

Jesus Christ through His crucifixion conquered the devil, sin, and death (Col. 2:15), and by that great victory He **led captive a host of captives**, who once were prisoners of the enemy but now are returned to the God and the people with whom they belong. The picture is vivid in its demonstration that God has yet-unsaved people who belong to Him—though they are naturally in Satan’s grasp and would remain there had not Christ by His death and resurrection made provision to lead them into the captivity of His kingdom into which they had been called by sovereign election “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4).

Upon arriving in heaven, **He gave gifts to men**. Here Paul uses yet another term for gifts (domata) to express the comprehensiveness of this gracious provision. After His ascension came all the gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 7:39). When the Savior was exalted on high, He sent the Spirit (Acts 1:8), and with the coming of the Spirit, also came His gifts to the church. Before Paul identifies the gifts he has in mind, he first gives a brief explanation of the analogy he has just used.

In explaining the application of the Old Testament passage, Paul says, **Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?** The *He* of whom Paul is speaking is the One who will fill all things—Jesus Christ, “**who fills all in all**” (1:23). **Ascended** refers to Jesus’ ascension from earth to heaven (Acts 1:9-11). He ascended from earth to heaven to forever reign with His Father.

Paul is quick to explain that the expression He **ascended** cannot **mean anything except that He also ... descended**. If, *ascended* refers to our Lord’s being taken up to heaven, then *descended* must refer to His coming down from heaven to earth. This truth is repeated in proper chronological sequence in verse 10: **He who descended is Himself also He who ascended**.

The depth of Christ’s descent in incarnation is said to be into **the lower parts of the earth**. This reference is presented to provide a striking contrast in terms of His ascent **far above all the heavens**, emphasizing the extreme range of our Lord’s degradation and exaltation. To understand the phrase **the lower parts of the earth** we need to examine its use elsewhere in Scripture. In Psalm 63:9 it has to do with death, being related to falling by the sword (v. 10). In Matthew 12:40 a similar phrase, “*the heart of the earth*,” refers to the belly of a great fish

where the prophet Jonah was kept. In Isaiah 44:23 the phrase refers to the created earth containing mountains, forests, and trees. Psalm 139:15 uses it in reference to the womb of a woman where God is forming a child. The sum of these uses indicates that the phrase relates to the created earth as a place of life and death. In the majority of the uses it appears in contrast to the highest heavens, as here in verses 8-10 and in Psalm 139:8, 15 and Isaiah 44:23. The intent of the phrase in this letter is not to point to a specific place, but to refer to the depth of the incarnation.

Peter sheds light on the meaning of ***He also descended into the lower parts of the earth***. In his first letter he says, *"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison"* (1 Pet. 3:18-19). Between Jesus' death on Calvary and His resurrection in the garden tomb, He was *"put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."* He was physically dead but spiritually alive. During the three days He was in that state He also descended *"and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison."* This does not refer to preaching the gospel but to making a triumphant announcement—in this case Christ's announcement of His victory over the demons.

**Paul's point in Ephesians 4:8-10 is to explain that Jesus' paying the infinite price of coming to earth and suffering death on our behalf qualified Him to be exalted *above all the heavens* (that is, to the throne of God), in order that He might rightfully have the authority to give gifts to His saints. By that victory He gained the right to rule His church and to give gifts to His church, that He might fill all things.**

Christmas Evans (1766-1838) commenting on Psalm 68:18 writes...

*"The ancient prophecy of David is fulfilled here on the foot of mount Olivet. To take "captivity captive," signifies that Christ conquered the allied principalities and powers, the devil, sin, death, and hell; and that he deprived them of the instruments wherewith they enslaved men. He not only silenced the cannon on the spiritual Gibraltar, but he took rock, fortifications, and all. He not only silenced the horrible and destructive battlements of the powerful and compactly united ghostly enemies, but he threw down the towers, razed the castles, and took away the keys of the dungeons.*

*He is the Master henceforth, and forever. He did, also, at the same time, save his people. Where, O Jesus, is the army of which thou art the Captain? "Here! all the names are written in pearls on the breastplate which I wear as a high priest." He had no sooner left the grave than he began to distribute his gifts, and did so all along the road on his way to his Father's house; and, especially after he entered the heaven of heavens, did he shower down gifts unto men, as a mighty conqueror loaded with treasures with which to enrich and adorn his followers and people. They were gifts of mercy: gifts to the rebellious; to those who threw down their arms at his feet in penitent submission, that the Lord God may dwell among them. The apostle shows that a portion of these gifts are gifts of ministry.*

*Accordingly, whenever God condescends to dwell among a people and in a country, he gives that people and country this ministry. He sends them his gospel in the mouths of faithful servants. He establishes there his house; the board and the candlestick; and then, in his Spirit, he dwells there and blesses his heritage."*

## **THE GIFTS OF CHRIST TO HIS CHURCH**

After Jesus ascended into heaven in triumph and sat at the right hand of God, perhaps the first act of the new King, was Pentecost (Acts 2), when he poured out his Holy Spirit to gift every member of his church.

Christ not only gives gifts to individual believers but to the total Body. To each believer He gives special gifts of divine enablement, and to the church overall He gives specially gifted men as leaders —as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

**"He gave"** emphasizes the sovereign choice and authority given to Christ because of His perfect fulfillment of the Father's will. Not only apostles and prophets but also evangelists, ... pastors and teachers are divinely called and placed.

**Apostles**, were those individuals chosen by Christ to be the foundation stones of the church and as such ceased to exist when the original apostles died. The apostle Paul was added to this group (as 'one untimely born' as he puts it in 1 Cor. 15:8). When his apostleship was attacked as inauthentic he defended it vigorously, arguing that all the necessary prerequisites for apostolic ministry were present in his life. He had seen the Lord and had been commissioned personally by Him.

**Prophets** were closely linked with the apostles and, among other activities, helped write the New Testament.

**Evangelists** are taken by some to be assistants to the apostles and so no longer exist. But the term could describe 'church planters' who develop new churches. And those that carry the gospel to the lost of the world. It would include both what we call the evangelist and the missionary.

**Pastors and Teachers** were clearly intended to be ongoing ministries in the church. The word pastor means shepherd. The pastor is the under-shepherd to the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The function of the teacher is to instruct believers in the truth of God and His Word. All pastors teach but not all teachers are pastors.

### References:

Ephesians- John MacArthur

Let's Study Ephesians- Sinclair Ferguson

The Purpose of God- Ephesians- R.C. Sproul

Ephesians-The Teachers Outline and Study Bible