

Ephesians 4:7-16

Introduction

You can see that even though there are three parts to this passage, it's all one unit [see page 8]. Each section mentions Christ's giving of gifts – so obviously this is a big deal and a main theme that ties the whole section together [see page 9] Also, the whole thing begins and ends on the same note with the same Greek words. [see page 10] Almost all English versions translate the last verse something like this: “according to the *proper* working of each individual part.” “Proper” is an interpretation of what the Greek word for “measure” means in this context. But this translation hides the *connection* that Paul intended *with verse 7*. Once we notice the connection with verse 7, we'll see that in verse 7 the emphasis is on the measure *of Christ's gift*. The emphasis is very much on Christ's *grace*! But we lose this emphasis entirely when we translate/(interpret) with the word “proper” in verse 16. “Proper” is not a wrong translation, it's just not nearly enough – it doesn't point us back to Christ's gracious gift. But that's exactly what Paul intended! So even though the literal translation is a little more “wooden,” and not immediately as obvious, I still believe it's more accurate and more theologically beautiful – “according to the working *in measure* of each single part.”

A number of versions translate more simply, “each part.” Why translate “each single part” when you can just translate, “each part”? Well, what Paul actually *said* was “each *single* part,” or even more literally “each *one* part.” That's what makes the connection with verse seven actually jump off the page at us. Remember last week, and all the emphasis on “*one*”? – “One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” (4:4-6) Well, in the Greek Paul's very first word in verse 7 is another “one,” but now his emphasis is not on our *unity* and *oneness*, but rather our *diversity* and how we are all *different* – “But to *each one* of us...” And it's this same idea of diversity and the importance of each different and unique member of the body that Paul wants to drive home again to our hearts and minds when he comes to the end of this section. So we see from the repetition of the theme of Christ's giving of gifts, and from the way that verses 7 and 16 are so similar to each other that this is all *one* section – and we've also learned something about the *theme* of this section (what it's all about).

But then we might ask, what's the point of verses 8-10? Paul could easily have skipped these verses and saved a lot of extra words! “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift... He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...” But instead, we have all this “stuff” in the middle. Hasn't Paul ever heard of “simple,” and “short and sweet,” and “to the point”? But somehow, for Paul, everything is very tied up with this middle section. This middle section isn't just an optional extra – it's absolutely essential. [see page 11]

First, we have the “therefore,” which ties this section with what comes before. And then Paul is *very careful* to show that this section also ties in with verses 11-16).

“Now what is [the meaning of] ‘HE ascended’ but that HE ALSO descended into the lower regions of the earth? HE WHO descended is HIMSELF THE ONE WHO ALSO”

ascended far above all the heavens that HE might fill all things. And HE HIMSELF gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...”

Many English versions translate more simply, “and He gave.” But this misses Paul’s point and emphasis, which was this:

“And HE HIMSELF—*this same one who descended into the lower regions of the earth and then ascended far above all the heavens – this very one!*—HE HIMSELF gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...”

But still, what’s the big deal? Why was this middle section so important to Paul when to us it might seem like he could easily have left it out? This morning, we’re just going to focus for a little bit on that middle section so that we can faithfully love it, and rejoice in it, and be more prepared to understand and appreciate what comes before and after.

But first, there is another reason that I’ve gone into this extra detail on the topic of translation. Our Church articles of faith begin with this statement about the Holy Scriptures: “We believe that *every word* of the Scriptures is inspired with the result that they are all the inerrant, authoritative, living, and eternal word of God *as represented in the original manuscripts*.” Every word—not just the thoughts and ideas, but every word—of the New Testament is inspired by God Himself not in the English, but in the Greek of the original manuscripts. The problem is that we don’t read Greek, and so we can be very, *very* grateful for our English translations. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, but Jesus used a Greek translation of the Old Testament and He could still speak of that translation as the Word of God. But the Greek translation was only the Word of God in so far as it reflected what the Hebrew words actually said. And the same is true of our English translations. When we translate Ephesians, it’s impossible to perfectly reduplicate the Greek, because that just wouldn’t work in English (we’d end up with a bunch of gibberish). So the question, then, in every translation is how far do we go to make things “work” in English? Because we believe that *every single word* of the Scriptures *in the original manuscripts is inspired by God*, then doesn’t it make sense that we should stay as close to the Hebrew and Greek as possible? This isn’t because we worship a book, but because we worship the one who has breathed out these very words for our salvation and for our growth in holiness.

- ✓ Matthew 4:4 — [Jesus] answered, “It is written, ““Man shall not live by bread alone, but by *every word* that comes from the mouth of God.””
- ✓ 2 Timothy 3:16–17 — *All Scripture* is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

I know enough Greek to interact with the Greek text and to understand the discussions and debates of those who know a whole lot more about Greek than I do. So instead of preaching from the ESV or the NASB I’ve been preaching from my own translation of Ephesians (which borrows very heavily from the work of numerous other translations, lexicons, commentaries, etc.). My goal has been to have a translation that makes “sense” in English (though it won’t always be as smooth or as simple to understand), but will allow *you* to “see” the Greek for

yourself *as much as possible*. So I encourage you, if you want to *study* and *meditate* on Ephesians, to take advantage of this very “unofficial” “translation” (it’s available on our website). I wish I could read the Greek fluently without ever needing any tools or helps. I wish this could be true for all of us. I wish this because every word of the Greek is breathed out by God. But since this isn’t possible, I’m so glad that God in His providence has ordained the translation of the Greek and Hebrew into English (*and* into numerous other languages; cf. Pitchers). As we read our Bibles (and choose our translations), let us love not just the thoughts and ideas, but even the words themselves, for we *live* not by bread alone, but by *every word* that comes from the mouth of God.

“Thanks to God whose [Words were] written in the Bible’s sacred page, record of the revelation showing God to every age. God has spoken, God has spoken; Praise Him for His [written Words].” (R.T. Brooks)

So now let’s just take a few minutes to focus on that “middle section” so that we can love it, and rejoice in it, and be more prepared to understand and appreciate what comes before it and after it. Paul begins: [see page 12]

I. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

You could say that these verses are about something we usually call “spiritual gifts” – gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of serving each other and bringing glory to God. To each of us here in this room, Paul says, grace has been given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. He’ll come back to this in verse eleven, but first Paul wants to put this whole idea of spiritual gifts into a bigger theological and doctrinal context. He wants to fit spiritual gifts into a bigger picture, and show how they grow from deeper roots. What is the real meaning and significance of these gifts of Christ’s grace that have been given to each and every single one of us?

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift...”

II. “Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led captive a host of captives; he gave gifts to men.’”

Paul is quoting from Psalm 68. Psalm 68 starts out like this:

- ✓ Psalm 68:1–3 — God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered... the wicked shall perish before God! But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before God; they shall be jubilant with joy!

The theme of Psalm 68 is God’s victory over the wicked, and the gladness and joy that results for all of God’s people. The Psalmist goes on to give the ultimate example of how God led His people safely through the wilderness—victoriously triumphing over all His enemies—until He brought them into the Promised Land.

- ✓ Psalm 68:7–8, 11-12, 14-18 — O God, when you went out before your people, when you marched through the wilderness, the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before

God, the One of Sinai, before God, the God of Israel... the women who announce the news are a great host: “The kings of the armies—they flee, they flee!” The women at home divide the spoil... The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them; [The God of] Sinai is now in the sanctuary [on Zion]. ***You ascended on high, you led captive your captives, you received gifts among men***, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there [in Zion].

So here we have God defeating His enemies (the Canaanites), and ultimately ascending triumphantly into the sanctuary (or the temple) on Mount Zion. As God ascends into His sanctuary on Mount Zion, He leads a host of captives and receives not only the spoils of those He’s defeated, but tribute from the surrounding nations. It’s a very graphic picture of military victory and triumph. All of these things especially came to pass in the days of King David who prepared for the building of the temple, and then King Solomon who actually built the sanctuary on Mount Zion. In the days of David and Solomon, God’s enemies were defeated and He received spoils and tribute from the nations. In Psalm 68, God’s triumph always results in the gladness and joy of His people. So we see the King receiving gifts among men. And when this happens, we assume that He then distributes these gifts among His people. This is what “good” kings did for their people. So this is why in Ephesians, Paul (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) can change “You ***received*** gifts ***among*** men” to “You ***gave*** gifts ***to*** men.” The “receiving” of gifts in Psalm 68 *assumes* also the “giving” of these gifts because God’s victory over His enemies is always for the sake of His people.

But what does all this have to do with the grace that Christ gives *today* to each one of *us* according to the measure of His gift? What do the spoils of war in Psalm 68 have to do with “spiritual gifts” in Ephesians 4? After looking back to God’s triumphant ascent to Zion in the past, the Psalmist goes on to describe God’s continuing triumphant ascents even in his own day.

- ✓ Psalm 68:19-20, 24-25 — Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears us up; God is our salvation... Your procession is seen, O God, the procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary—the singers in front, the musicians last, between them virgins playing tambourines.

God had not just ascended to Zion *once* in the *past*, but *many times* – continuing even into the Psalmist’s own day. He had seen these triumphant processions with his own eyes. And he knew that God’s initial triumphant ascent in the past, and His continuing triumphant ascents in the present pointed to the promise of an *ultimate* and *final* triumphant ascent into Zion one day in the future. On that future day, all the kingdoms of the whole earth would finally sing God’s praises, and God’s people would be full of gladness and joy.

- ✓ Psalm 68:28–29, 32-35 — Summon your power, O God, the power, O God, by which you have worked for us. Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you... O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord, to him who rides in the heavens, the ancient heavens; behold, he sends out his voice, his mighty voice. Ascribe power to God, whose majesty is over Israel, and whose power is in the skies. Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. Blessed be God!

That's certainly a powerful vision of God's triumph and victory! Actually, Paul has already described the fulfillment of this vision in his letter to the Ephesians!

- ✓ Ephesians 1:20-23 — [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come; and He put all things under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

This triumphant ascent of Christ into the heavenly Zion is the true and ultimate fulfillment of all of God's past triumphant ascents into the earthly Zion. This is the victorious ascent to which all of the other victorious ascents were leading and pointing. They were always looking forward; but now we can look backwards to the victory that Christ has already won and the ascent Christ has already made. Here we see again how the Old Testament is always pointing us to Jesus. Here's another example of how every jot and title of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the Gospel, and in a manner and way that the Old Testament saints, and even the angels themselves could never have imagined. All of biblical prophecy is so much richer than simple bare predictions and “tit for tat” fulfillments. The fulfillment is always packed with truth and meaning. In this place, the fulfillment is packed with the truth that Christ has conquered, and we now share in the peace, and the joy and the blessing of His triumph. So Paul goes on to say this:

III. Now what is [the meaning of] ‘he ascended’ but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is himself the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

If Christ is the one who *ascended*, then obviously, since He is the eternal Son of God, He first had to descend from His place in heaven (cf. Thielman). But if He descended, what was the point? There's a lot of debate about the meaning of these words, but the main idea seems to be that in Christ's descent into “the lower regions of the earth,” He did battle with death and the grave, and in His ascent far above all the heavens He triumphed over the evil rulers and authorities in the heavenly places and began His reign as King of kings and Lord of lords so that He might fill all things – so that all things might one day be united in Him, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him (1:10; cf. Thielman). We can think of what Paul says in Philippians:

- ✓ Philippians 2:10 — At the name of Jesus every knee [will] bow, *in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*

So let's put it all together now. Paul began with these very “practical” words: “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.” But before he goes on to explain this, he steps back to look at the bigger picture, and to put Christ's gifts – whatever they may be – in a theological context. For Paul this context is just as practical and just as necessary for us to know and be aware of as are all of the applications and exhortations.

“But to each one of us *grace was given* according to the measure of *Christ's gift*. **THEREFORE** it says [this is the *fulfillment* of what it says in Psalm 68], ‘When he ascended on high he led captive a host of captives; he *gave gifts* to men.’ Now what is

[the meaning of] ‘he ascended’ but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is himself the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.”

What Paul wants us to see is that the grace that each and every single one of us have received according to the measure of Christ’s gift is the direct *result* of Christ’s victorious conquest of all His enemies and His triumphant ascent into heaven. *This then means* that the grace that each and every single one of us have received according to the measure of Christ’s gift is for the *purpose* of bringing about that day when, as the triumphant King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus will fill all things, and all things will be united in Him – things in heaven and things on earth. Finally, Christ’s giving of these gifts to all of us is the sign that His victory over His enemies was for our sake – for our blessing, and gladness, and joy. (After all, why else would His gifts to us be called *gifts*?) As we use the gifts that we have been given, we can rejoice in Christ the victorious King and gift-Giver, as we are actually participating in His triumph. As one commentator puts it: “Christ has attained victory over the... enemies of God and his people, and now... [He] is distributing the spoils of that victory to his people.” (Thielman)

Have we *ever* thought of “spiritual gifts” in this light before? Only now—now that we have fully understood these things—is Paul ready to pick up where he left off in verse seven and explain in more detail what some of these gifts actually are and how it’s all meant to work.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. **Therefore** it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led captive a host of captives; he gave gifts to men.’ Now what is [the meaning of] ‘he ascended’ but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? **He who descended is himself** the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.”

IV. “And HE HIMSELF [this same one who descended into the lower regions of the earth and then triumphantly ascended far above all the heavens – this very one!—HE HIMSELF] GAVE [as the spoils of war] the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in the service of the scheme of error; but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, being joined together and united together by every supporting connection, according to the working in measure of each single part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Conclusion

Aren’t these words invested with so much more power and beauty now that we can read them in the context of Christ’s triumph over His enemies, and His distributing of the spoils of war as gifts to His people – for our own blessing, and to bring about that day when as King of kings and Lord of Lords, He fills all things? For Paul, *the* driving force behind any and all living that is pleasing to God was theology and doctrine. It was an ever growing, ever deepening vision of

God's Kingdom, and of the mystery of His plan for the fullness of the times (1:9-10). This theology and doctrine is nothing less than the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel. Apart from this theology and doctrine (apart from these inexhaustible riches of the Gospel), we cannot sustain any kind of truly joyful and faithful obedience.

So may God help us more, and more, and more to always see the bigger picture. May God help us always to see the vast riches of the Gospel in every law and every command. Especially as we look ahead to next week, may God help us all to use the gifts that we have been given from the spoils of our triumphant King with true gladness and joy.

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

4:8-10 Therefore it says, 'When he ascended on high he led captive a host of captives; he gave gifts to men.' Now what is [the meaning of] 'he ascended' but that he also descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is himself the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fill all things.

4:11-16 And he himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints unto the work of ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in the service of the scheme of error; but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, being joined together and united together by every supporting connection, according to the working in measure of each single part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

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4:7 But to **EACH ONE** of us *grace was given* according to the **MEASURE** of Christ's gift.

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