

## Gracious Gifts – Eph 4:7-10

Before we get into the Word, I want to take a few minutes to pray for our country. The last few months have been disheartening and concerning to say the least. From election issues and political vitriol, to the shameful violence and break-in at the Capitol, to the suppression of free speech and corporate cancelling, to who knows what else in the next few days. It's concerning.

As is the social media commentary from arm-chair “experts,” or those inclined toward drama. People who stir the pot, and take pot-shots. It’s not helpful. Especially when we do it; believers. It doesn’t build one another up. It’s often passive-aggressive. And it brings shame to the name. Shame to Jesus and shame to his church.

So I want to pray. For our country, and for us. Will you join me?

Prayer – Father, our hearts are heavy; and unsettled. Our hope is diminished. Our confidence is shaken. So will you do what only *you* can do?

Will you bolster our faith and dispel our fear? Will you hear our prayers and calm our panic? Will you remind us of your unshakeable sovereignty? Your perfect plan? Your constant presence? Your faithful promises?

And God, will you silence the voices of violence and frenzy in our nation, and amplify the voices of reason and peace? Will you suppress those who hate, and elevate those who love? Will you dissipate the riots and congregate the churches? Will you preserve law and order, and restrain those who break it?

God, will you increase the wisdom of leaders, and decrease the influence of haters? Will you expose foolishness and replace it with godliness? Will you preserve peace and eliminate strife?

Boost our trust and settle our hearts. Defeat the powers of darkness and magnify your light. Give us the mind of Christ and the perspective of heaven. The heart of victors instead of victims.

Replace our fear with faith. Keep our eyes on things above and our hands on the plow below. Bring revival out of this, Lord. Stir hearts. Grant repentance. Fall afresh. We pray in Jesus name, amen. (**Title**)

➤ Let’s turn in our Bibles to Eph 4:7-10. It’s been awhile since we’ve been here, and we’ve covered a lot of ground. From the spiritual blessings of our salvation in chapter 1, to our grace and unity in chapter 2, to Paul’s prayer in chapter 3. We’ve covered a lot.

And having crossed into chapter 4, we found that Paul begins to *apply* all of that. He moves from doctrine to application. Including this passage. V7-10. (**Intro**)  
So follow along with me as I read, starting in v4, just to get the flow of thought.

*[4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

*[7] 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.) (ESV)*

Paul starts v7 with the word *but*. But grace was given. Which seems a bit out of place at first. But on further scrutiny I think Paul is saying there’s one Lord, one faith, and one church; but a *host* of gracious gifts. A bunch of them. And not just any old gifts, but spiritual gifts. That’s the idea. And the main point.

### **Jesus gives every one of us spiritual gifts. (v7)**

*Every-one*, as in *every believer*. Every one of his followers. Every person who puts their faith and trust in him. *Grace was given to each one of us.* (7)

But don’t miss the first phrase. It’s super important.

#### **• “Grace was given”**

Jesus extends unmerited favor to us. Grace. Not saving grace mind you, but *serving* grace. Paul already covered saving grace; chapters 1&2. This is *serving* grace. In the form of spiritual gifts. Various abilities to fulfill the work of ministry and do his will. When Jesus saves us, he gives us grace, in the form of *serving* gifts.

➤ I say that for 2 reasons.

1. That’s the context both before and *after* these verses. In chapter 3 he talks about serving gifts, like in v7-8; and later on in *this* chapter he talks about serving gifts. Vs 11 and 16. So it’s likely he’s talking about the *same* here in v7.

2. The second reason he’s talking about spiritual gifts of serving, is that v8 implies it. In support of the statement he just made in v7, Paul says – “*When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.*” Not a gift, like the gift of salvation; but gifts plural. Implying special endowments to love and bless one another. They’ve been given. Gracious gifts. That’s the first phrase.

The second, is . . .

#### **• “To each one of us”**

*Grace was given to each one of us.* (7) No exceptions. We *all* have spiritual gifts. Just like it says in **1 Cor 12:7** – *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* Each and every child of God has received at least one heightened ability to serve, bless, help, organize, teach, lead, exhort, give, shepherd, you name it.\*\*\*\*\*

When you were saved, you were graced. Not only with forgiveness and eternal life, but gifts.

And those gifts were given . . .

#### **• “According to the measure of Christ’s gift”**

The third phrase. *He* gives us our spiritual gifts. The one who loves us, knows us, saves us, and indwells us. The one who has the storehouse of heaven at his disposal. Can you think of anyone you’d *rather* get gifts from?

We exchanged gifts this weekend as a *family*, and there's no one I'd rather receive one from, than Becky. Because she knows me best, and has more money at her disposal. And gives accordingly. Just like Jesus. He knows us best, and never lacks.

Of course (**Henry**), both of us received the gift of another grandson. This is Henry Daniel. About as precious as they get. And worth more than all the money in the world.

➤ But I digress.\*\*\*\*\* Jesus knows us best and never lacks. And the *amount* of spiritual giftedness he gives, either in quality or quantity, isn't random. It's according to his *measure*. His perfectly thought out, specifically designed, carefully apportioned amount and type. Just for you. And the work he has *planned* for you.

To one, he gives one portion and one ability to one extent; to another he gives another ability, another portion, and a different extent.

But to everyone, and each one, he gives everything we need. Everything we need to live his way. Everything we need for life and godliness. (**Summary**)

Make no mistake; or excuses. Jesus gives every one of us spiritual gifts. *Enabling* every one of us to *do* what we should.

Second:

**It's one of the reasons he ascended to heaven (v8-10)**

To give every one of us gifts of grace. V8-10.

Because Jesus gives us spiritual gifts: [8] *Therefore it says*, “*When he ascended on high he led a host of captives* [quoting Ps 68:18], *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.)* [Might give us everything we need for life and godliness. And eventually fill the whole *earth* with his power and presence; when he returns.] It's one of the reasons he ascended.

As is, his exaltation. That's the idea of *far above all the heavens* in v10. It's an expression of exaltation. When Jesus ascended back to heaven, he was exalted above every-one and every *thing*.

➤ That said, v9-10 are an explanation and application of v8. Hence the parentheses. Paul interrupts his flow of thought to explain that Ps 68:18, the *first* part of the quote in v8, refers to Jesus. When he ascended to heaven, he led a host of *followers*. Those *captives* to his goodness and greatness.

And to those followers, he gave gifts; v8b. *He gave gifts to men*. Gifts to his people. More than just ascending to go home, or to be *exalted*, Jesus returned to heaven to give us spiritual gifts. Instead of being out-of-sight out-of-mind, he remembered us; and blesses us.

If that doesn't increase your awe and gratitude of Jesus, I don't know what will. Of all the things, he had *us* in mind when he returned to heaven. Our *gifts*. He ascended it says, *that he might fill all things*. Including us.

➤ Now, with that in mind, there are **two difficulties** here that require some explanation. The first, is one that a skeptic or naysayer might use to undermine your confidence in God's Word. It's found in **verse 8b**. Where it says, *he gave gifts to men*. That phrase is the difficulty. Because **Ps 68:18** says:

*You [God] ascended on high, leading a host of captives [followers] in your train and receiving gifts among men.* Not giving, but receiving. Paul says Jesus *gave gifts to men*.

So what gives? Did he have a momentary lapse in memory? Did the Holy Spirit make a mistake in inspiring him? Is the Bible just another book after all? No, no, and no.\*\*\*\*\*

➤ When Paul writes, *It says* in v8, it's not his usual way of referring to Scripture. Usually he says something like, “*The Scripture says*.” (Rom 10:11; Gal 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18)

But here, it's a *generic* designation: *it*. Referring to something *other* than Scripture that contains this quote. And that something, is an ancient Jewish *commentary* on Scripture called a **targum**.

A targum is an oral translation and *interpretation* of the Old Testament. Common among religious Jews in the centuries leading up to Christ's birth. They'd *memorize* the Scriptures, with a particular interpretation, and then verbalize it to pass it down.

And we know what some of those oral interpretations are, because they were later *written* down. And for Ps 68:18, **several of them** say, “*Thou hast ascended on high . . . thou hast given gifts to men*.”

So when Paul writes, *it says . . . he gave gifts to men*, it's not a misquote of *Scripture*, but an accurate quote from a *commentary* on Scripture. A commentary that Paul applies to Jesus, and *makes* Scripture. As he writes it.

All that to say, don't be swayed. Difficulties or not, the Bible stands up to scrutiny. God's Word is exactly that: God's Word. True and reliable cover to cover.

➤ The second difficulty, is the phrase in **verse 9**, that says, *he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth*. A difficulty, because some have construed that to mean that Jesus visited hell.

But that doesn't square with a consistent biblical theology, or other Scriptures like Luke 23:43. Where Jesus said to the thief on the cross, *today you will be with me in paradise*. Today. Or Acts 2:31 where Peter says that Jesus *was not abandoned to Hades*.

Most likely, here in Eph 4, Paul simply refers to the incarnation of Jesus, descending from heaven above, to earth below. Or at most, his incarnation and burial. (**Summary**)

Two difficulties, that ought not *undermine* your confidence in the Bible, but *reinforce* it. And both are part of the point that Jesus ascended to heaven to give every single one of us spiritual gifts. May our worship and gratitude always reflect it.

And last, may we always use our gifts. One of the reasons Jesus ascended back to heaven, was to give you spiritual gifts.

## So by all means use your gifts (Rom 12:6)

It's the very thing Paul's explicit about in **Rom 12:6**. *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.*

No matter how much time and effort it takes, use them. No matter how much work it requires, use them. No matter how much money you spend, use them. It's never too early, and never too late. I don't care *how* young you are in your faith. Or *how* old your age. It's never too early and never too late to use your spiritual gifts.

➤ This is a **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible**. It's about 9x11 and 2 inches thick, with 1600 pages, 2 point font, and no space.

But even more astounding, is that it contains a numbering system for 8674 Hebrew words, and 5523 Greek words. And listed under every word, is every place in the Bible that it's used.

Most amazing however, is that it was first published, in *1890*. Long before computers and search engines were even a gleam in somebody's eye. Because a man named **James Strong** spent 35 years of his life working on it. Cataloging every single word by hand. In addition to serving as the editor of a massive 10-volume *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*. I barely know what that means.

And if *that*'s not enough, he also worked on the committee that produced the American Standard Version of the Bible. And did I mention that he started a *seminary* in the middle of it all? (<https://www.5minutesinchurchhistory.com/who-is-strong/>)

God gave him the gifts, and he used them. By any and all means, he used them. He applied them. He taught in the classroom by day, and labored in the library at night. Day in and day out, until the day he died. And we're the better for it.\*\*\*\*\*

➤ Don't squander your gifts. Whether at work, home, or church. Don't squander them by sitting on the sidelines. Don't ignore them by doing something else. And don't make excuses like, "I'm too young, I'm too old, or I'm too busy." (Concordance)

God has given every single one of us the gifts we *need*, to do what's *needed*. Including the time, talent, treasure, and strength. (**Summary**)

Gifts. All of them. So by all means, *use* them.

Prayer – Lord. Find us faithful. Faithful to use what you've given. Faithful to seize opportunities and respond to needs. Faithful to advance your kingdom and do what you want. Spur us on.