

## The Gift of Grace

### Ephesians 4: 7-10

As we come to the text today, we must bear in mind the preceding verses. Paul has spoken at length regarding our unity in the Lord. We have been called to walk worthy of our calling, serving and loving one another, while endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. Such an admonition is bound in the unity we share through salvation in Christ. While there are many members within the church, there is but one Body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, and one God and Father of all.

However, our text offers a contrast to the “oneness” we discovered in the preceding verses. In the midst of our unity, there is diversity. Within one body, there are many individual members with specific and unique gifts. Our diversity does not create division or discord; in fact, it adds to the beauty and harmony of the whole. Such diversity within the body is within the Lord’s sovereign design for His church. This diversity is actually a product of His amazing grace.

Our text offers insight regarding the varied [facets](#) of our diversity and the grace associated with such diverse harmony within the church. Let’s consider: [The Gift of Grace](#).

**I. The Presentation of Grace** (7) – [But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ](#). Paul spoke of the presentation of grace within the body. Consider:

**A. The Delivery** (7a) – [But unto every one of us is given grace](#). Such grace is not reserved for a select few or limited within the body of Christ. Paul emphatically declares that every believer is a recipient of this grace. As grace, it is isn’t deserved; it isn’t earned or based on merit, and no amount of personal effort is required in order to receive this grace. It is a free gift, received by every believer at salvation. If you have received salvation in Christ, you possess this grace!

- Such grace provides abundance for the believer. While we don’t have time to do an exhaustive study of such grace, in light of this passage, grace not only saves, it also enables the believer in service to Christ and Christian living. [Rom.5:1-2 – Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: <sup>2</sup> By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.](#)

**B. The Diversity** (7b) – [But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ](#). Paul reveals an interesting detail. Every believer is a recipient of grace, but each has received a unique measure of grace in Christ. This measure speaks of “*a specific portion*.” The

grace we have received is determined according to the sovereign will of the Lord. He gifts us individually according to His divine plan for the church collectively and us individually. “*Enabling grace is measured out to be consistent with what is necessary for the operation of Christ’s gift.*”<sup>i</sup>

- One is right to discern the grace of which Paul speaks is directly related to the spiritual giftedness of individual believers. As we are called of Christ in salvation, expected to walk worthy of our calling, He gifts us with a measure of grace to enable our service and use the spiritual gifts received of the Spirit. All are uniquely gifted. The church needs the varied gifts of the individual members of the body for the good of the whole. While unity is expected, unity does not demand uniformity. Our diversity in grace is essential to the church and the fulfillment of her mission.

**II. The Possession of Grace (8)** – In the remaining verses of our text, Paul focused on the source of such grace – the Lord, Jesus Christ. Apart from His obedience to the Father, fulfilling redemption’s plan, none would enjoy such grace. These verses are believed to be Paul’s commentary on Psalm 68. He refers to:

**A. The Lord’s Ascension (8a)** – *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high...* This is clearly a reference to the Lord’s ascension following His triumphant resurrection. Psalm 68 is a victory psalm; a hymn sang in praise to God for victory in battle. Following His death and resurrection, Jesus returned to the right hand of the Father, having obtained victory over sin, Satan, death, and hell. Apart from His triumphant victory, He would have been unable to provide for our redemption; we would yet be in our sin, without hope and apart from His good grace. He forever defeated the enemies of Satan and the effects of sin within humanity. Our Lord ascended victorious!

**B. The Lord’s Liberation (8b)** – *Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.* These final verses have been the source of debate and confusion, but if one will allow the text to speak, they are quite clear. As Christ ascended, having obtained victory, He led captivity captive, giving gifts to men. Let’s look at the text. *He led captivity captive.* Whom does Paul speak of being in captivity? Bear in mind, he is in the middle of a discourse on the gift of grace. Clearly, he is referring to those captive to sin, bound by their sin and dominated by the prince of this world. As Christ overcame the grave, rising in triumphant resurrection, He liberated those in captivity to sin, leading them captive unto Himself as He became the Captain of their salvation. His provision in salvation and the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of which Paul speaks.

**III. The Purchase of Grace (9)** – Paul refers to the great sacrifice Jesus made in order to purchase grace for believers. Again, we need to let the text speak for itself. Consider:

**A. The Incarnation** (9) – [Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?](#) There is much debate surrounding this verse and varied interpretations as to Paul's implied meaning. In light of context, and the previous verse referring to His glorious ascension back into heaven, I would argue Paul is primarily speaking of the incarnation of Christ – His laying aside the glories of heaven, putting on a robe of flesh, coming to earth in the form of a man, in order to provide Himself the sacrificial atonement for sin. In order for there to be an ascension, Christ first had to descend. When considering grace, this doctrinal truth cannot be overlooked. It was grace that brought God to man in order to provide salvation and reconciliation!

**B. The Implication** (9) – It is argued by scholars that Paul sought to contrast the glories of heaven to which Christ ascended following the resurrection with the lower parts of the earth, quite simply coming to dwell upon the earth among men as John described. [John 1:14 – And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, \(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,\) full of grace and truth.](#) As stated above, I argue this is Paul's primary implication within the context of this verse.

- However, in light of the whole of Scripture, and certainly Paul's depth of theological wisdom, to limit this simply to the incarnation would likely be an injustice to the text. Paul already declared that He led captivity captive. The happenings of His three days buried in the tomb remain somewhat a mystery to us, but we do know that Christ conquered death, hell, and the grave. This would certainly fit within the narrative before us. Peter proclaimed that Jesus preached unto the captive spirits in prison during this mysterious time, declaring Himself victorious. While we do not have all the information we would like, one can rest assured that Christ overcame the penalty of sin and death as He descended into the lower parts of the earth, however vast such an implication may be. We know He rose again triumphant, conquering death and ascended back to the right hand of the Father, being highly exalted of Him. [Col.2:15 – And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.](#)

- As I look at these verses, I rejoice in the sovereign authority of Christ my Lord. Although He humbled Himself, being obedient to death on the cross, death and the grave were unable to hold Him captive. He overcame triumphant, and provided eternal life, free from the penalty of sin and death for all who come to Him by faith believing.

**IV. The Provision in Grace** (10) – [He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.](#) Finally, Paul makes reference to the great provision in grace. Such provision is provided for those redeemed by the Lord's grace. Notice:

**A. The Lord's Identity (10a)** – He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens. Lest anyone would be mistaken, Paul again affirms the deity and identity of Christ. He that descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens. He wanted to ensure that all who read these words were clear that Jesus Christ our Lord is the one who descended from heaven in order to provide salvation for mankind, and following His fulfillment of the Father's will, He ascended back into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of God interceding for us today. Christ is the one who provided for our salvation. He is the Lord and Redeemer of our soul; He is King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the highly exalted one, worthy of our praise, worship, and obedience.

**B. The Lord's Sovereignty (10b)** – He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. Paul declares that Christ accomplished all this that He might fulfill all things. This was affirmed as He declared, "It is Finished," as He willingly laid down His life in order to atone for sin and provide for our redemption. As He ascended back to the Father, He knew He had completed the work He came to fulfill.

- As we bring this thought into a contextual focus, we find comfort knowing the power and provision of Christ, made available through His crucifixion and triumphant resurrection, afford believers the abundant grace we have discussed today. Christ is our sovereign provider. In salvation, we have received all we need to live our Christian lives in light of eternity. Our Lord ascended with the promise to come again and receive us unto Himself for all eternity. Such grace is unfathomable, but I am thankful to have been a recipient.

**Conclusion:** As I look over the congregation, I am reminded of the grace of God in our lives. I see many who were captive to sin, living in condemnation, and without hope. Yet, the Captain of our salvation led those who were in captivity to sin captive to Himself. He has gifted us with a measure, a specific portion, of His grace. We stand together as a diverse group, and yet we are united in Christ. I pray that we will rejoice in the grace we have received and be good stewards of His gracious gift.

If you have yet to respond to the gospel and the call of salvation, I urge you to respond in repentance and faith today. Christ came to offer Himself the atoning sacrifice for your sin. Salvation is available to you, but you must come to Him in order to receive the gift.

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 135.