

BECOMING A PEOPLE OF GRACE

STUDY THIRTEEN

His Gift and Our Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–11

We are possessors of a limitless power source at work in each of one of us that comes out in a practical way in the exercising of our gifts.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

THROUGH His death on the cross, Christ built a bridge linking sinful humanity and God. He also “broke down the wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles, linking together His followers as one new unified people (Ephesians 2:14). Unity is a core value for Paul, a strong current in the flow of his letter.

But is unity the same as uniformity? When God made us one in Christ, did He create a collection of assembly-line robots, each one walking, talking, and acting the same? Definitely not! We are the *body* of Christ. And just as a physical body includes diverse members that complement and benefit one another, so also the body of Christ is made up of a diversity of individuals, each one with unique characteristics working together as one.

To help us function together gracefully, Christ gave us the gifts of the Spirit. As you recall from our study of Ephesians 2, Christ already gave us the gift of salvation: “God saved [us] by his grace when [we] believed . . . it is a gift from God” (2:8). God gave us this free gift when we came to the cross in faith and trusted Christ as Savior. But the same One—who with nail-pierced hands gave us the gift of *spiritual life*—also imparted gifts for *spiritual living*, along with the *spiritual enablement* to help us make these gifts work! Let’s look more closely at these wonderful gifts, what they are and how Christ gave them to each one of us.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

How gracious of our Savior to not only unite Christians as one people but also to supply us with what we need to live together well. Every member of Christ’s body has a unique gift and a valuable role to fill. As we examine God’s Word, ask the Lord to help you know His joy in using your gift.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

A key Bible-study strategy is to read the verses that come before and after a passage to better grasp the context. Go back to the beginning of Ephesians 4 and read our current passage in its context all the way through verse 16: *Ephesians 4:1–16*.

As we learned in the previous study, Paul gave his readers the overarching command “to lead a life worthy of your calling” (Ephesians 4:1). How do we do this? In Ephesians 4:1–16, Paul presents the first answer: *by walking in unity*.

In 4:1–6, Paul lays the theological foundation for our unity in the church—the three-in-one nature of God. In 4:7–11, he gives the basis for our diversity in the church—our spiritual gifts. And, as we’ll see in the next study, Paul links the two concepts, showing us how we achieve unity *through* diversity in the body of Christ (4:12–16). Now, let’s zero in on the passage at hand: 4:7–11.



Observation: What Christ Did for Us

We begin with observation in *Searching the Scriptures*.¹ Look for the verbs that carry the flow of thought through the passage and write down the phrases that communicate Christ’s actions in *Ephesians 4:7–8*.

While explaining what Christ did to give us spiritual gifts, Paul abruptly inserted a parenthetical explanation of Christ’s ascension in verses 9–10. Then, in the next verse, he returned to the theme of the gifts “Christ gave to the church” (Ephesians 4:11).



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Paul's parenthesis can be confusing. To see more clearly his flow of thought, let's remove the parenthetical section and save it for the interpretation phase. The passage reads like this without verses 9 and 10:

However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ.

That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,

he led a crowd of captives

and gave gifts to his people. . . .”

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. (Ephesians 4:7–8, 11)

Can you better see Paul's progression of thought from Christ's "gift" in 4:7 to "gifts" in 4:8 and then the list of gifts in 4:11? Let's look at each part of this fascinating Scripture!

He Gave the Gift of Grace—Ephesians 4:7

The word, *however*, in Ephesians 4:7 indicates a contrast from the previous verse. In contrast to "Father of *all* . . . over *all*, in *all*, and through *all* (Ephesians 4:6, emphasis added), Paul narrowed his scope from "all" of us to "each one of us" (4:7). It's as if he turned to each individual in his audience, including you and me, and said, "This is for you!"

Read 4:7 in the New American Standard Bible, and in the space below, rewrite the verse but insert your name instead of the phrase, "each one of us." What did *you* receive from Christ?

“Grace” is a one-word synonym for the gospel. It’s the good news that Jesus Christ came to bear the sins of the world. He overcame death, the grave, and the power of the Enemy. He was resurrected and is seated at the Father’s right hand to live and reign over His people. Our sins are forgiven, washed clean by His blood. That’s the gift! “To each one of us grace was given.” —Chuck Swindoll



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He Led a Host of Captives—Ephesians 4:8

We received God’s grace at the cross when we came to faith in Christ. But God never meant us to stop there. After all, Jesus isn’t on the cross anymore! Having vanquished the enemy death, Christ was raised and ascended into heaven as victorious King.

Paul didn’t imagine Christ as a limp and lifeless body on the cross but as glorious God. In Ephesians 4:8, he quotes Psalm 68 to illustrate Christ’s triumph. In the following chart, read Psalm 68:18 alongside Paul’s quote in Ephesians 4:8. Write down below what you observe as you compare the verses and how Paul applied it to Christ.

Psalm 68:18	Ephesians 4:8
<p><i>When you ascended to the heights, you led a crowd of captives. You received gifts from the people.</i></p>	<p><i>That is why the Scriptures say, “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”</i></p>

Psalm 68 recalled how God led the Hebrew captives out of Egypt, scattered the kings of the earth, and ascended Mount Sinai. In ultimate fulfillment of God’s triumph, Christ also led His people to freedom, scattered the powers of death, and ascended the heavenly heights. When Christ ascended, however, He didn’t receive gifts from His people. He *gave* spiritual gifts to His people. What a wonderful expression of grace!



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Pause here for a moment of reflection. Do you sometimes feel like you have stopped at the cross and not made much progress in your Christian walk? How do you picture Jesus? How does your concept of Jesus affect your ability to move forward?

He Gave Spiritual Gifts—Ephesians 4:11

In His triumph, Christ distributed the bounty of His victory in the form of spiritual gifts. Paul didn't list all the gifts Christ gave His church, but he did name four. What are they in *Ephesians 4:11*?

What role did the apostles and prophets fulfill in the church in Paul's day, according to *2:20* and *3:4–5*?



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In the early days of the church, apostles were the spiritual pioneers who shaped the doctrine of the church, and prophets were inspired spokespersons for God before the Scriptures were complete. Today, evangelists introduce people to Christ, and pastors / teachers shepherd people and feed them the solid food of the Word. Of all the gifts Christ gave to the church, why do you think Paul listed these four here?



Interpretation: An Important Parenthesis

Now let's consider the possible interpretations of Paul's puzzling parenthesis.

(Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:9–10 NASB)

What does “He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?” mean? Paul could have had in mind Christ's descent from heaven to earth at His incarnation. The New Living Translation reflects this interpretation: “Christ descended to our lowly world” (4:9). Or Paul could have meant Christ's descent into the grave. Another view is the “lower parts of the earth” might refer to the place of departed spirits, or Sheol, where, according to Peter, Christ “preached to the spirits in prison” (1 Peter 3:19).²

Whatever Paul meant by Christ's descent, his point about Christ's ascension was clear. By ascending into heaven, Christ did not leave the world behind; rather, He ascended so that He might fill the world more completely with His presence. According to *John 16:7, 13* and *Colossians 1:27*, what were the benefits of Christ's ascension?



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Through the Spirit, Christ fills His people—“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27 NASB). And He inhabits the entire creation with His glory—“who fills all things everywhere with himself” (Ephesians 1:23). All this was made possible because Christ ascended into heaven. How important is the ascension to our present relationship with Christ and our hope for the future!

On His ascension, Christ made clear to the demonic realm, “I am victorious over all powers.” He is the supreme preeminent One. That’s the reason all our praise goes to Christ and why we lift Him up and exalt Him as Savior and God. Great theology! —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: What Are Spiritual Gifts?

If Christ hadn’t ascended, we wouldn’t have His gifts. Thankfully, He has blessed us with them, but what are they exactly? In his commentary on Ephesians, Chuck Swindoll offers a helpful definition:

It is a God-given ability or skill that enables a believer to perform a specific function in the body of Christ with effectiveness and ease.³

Other New Testament passages unveil more spiritual gifts than the four Paul listed in Ephesians 4. All of them are listed on page 10. Let’s overview key passages on the spiritual gifts that answer the following questions.

Who has a spiritual gift? Read *1 Corinthians 12:7*.

In whose strength do we perform our spiritual gifts and for what purpose? Read *1 Peter 4:11*.



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What should our attitude be toward those with different gifts? Read *1 Corinthians 12:12–25*.

What is God's role in the spiritual gifts? Read *1 Corinthians 12:4–6*.

God distributes spiritual gifts “as He wills.” That keeps me from feeling inadequate or complaining that I don’t have another gift. It’s not about what I want; it’s about what He wants me to have. You have the gifts God wanted you to have. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Our Differences Enhance Our Unity

God desires diversity. Variety enhances our unity, not threatens it. We can encourage and foster other people's giftedness by recognizing God's hand in their lives and acknowledging the effectiveness of their work when they exercise their gift.

What about your spiritual gift? Look through the list of spiritual gifts on page 10. *You* are on that page! What gift or gifts do you think God has given you?



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How can you put your gift into action today?

What a relief to know that we don't have to copy other people's gifts. We can exercise the gift God gave us and feel His power when we see Him working through us in ways beyond our own abilities. There's no greater joy than that!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for seeing me as a unique person and gifting me in a unique way. I receive Your blessing with humble gratitude. Give me opportunities to use my gifts and, in so doing, contribute to the health of Christ's body. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. For more detailed explanation of these views, consult Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 238–40.
3. Swindoll, *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians*, 240.
4. Insight for Living Ministries, "His Gift and Our Gifts," in *Becoming a People of Grace Study Guide* (Plano, TX: IFL Publishing House, 2001), 112. Spiritual gifts of healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and miracles were confirming signs of the Spirit in the era of the early church and appear to have ceased today.



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Spiritual Gifts[†]

Administration—the ability to organize people in the church toward a specific goal

Discernment—an uncanny ability to distinguish truth from error or to evaluate spirits to determine if they are from God or Satan

Evangelism—a special ability to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ to unbelievers or to train others to do so

Exhortation—the ability to effectively challenge and encourage believers to shore up weaknesses and grow in the faith

Faith—an inclination or ability to genuinely trust God when there seems to be no human or natural basis for that trust

Giving—a joyful and eager generosity that gives resources (material and otherwise) without any motives for self-benefit or reciprocation

Hospitality—a cheerful openness to host, shelter, and feed fellow believers at home whenever the need arises

Knowledge—a knack for understanding the meaning of Scripture

Leadership—having the zeal and communication skills to rally people in the church around a common cause or goal

Mercy—a devoted, freely given compassion for those who are needy and suffering

Ministering—performing any task that benefits others by joyfully meeting their practical or material needs (also called “helps” or “service”)

Pastoring / Teaching—a bent toward caring for and protecting fellow believers, and being able to understand the complex teachings of the Bible and explain them in an easily understandable way

Wisdom—the ability to consistently make wise decisions and provide godly insights for problems

