

Grace Given

Ephesians 4:7-10

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.) (Ephesians 4:7-10)

When Christ came to earth and ministered among us, calling men and women to Himself in eternal salvation, we need understand that His mission and His efforts were, in every way, full and complete and able to accomplish all that He intended. Nothing was left to chance or happenstance. Nothing, not even the smallest of concerns or considerations was missed or forgotten.

And the redemption that He wrought for us in His death, burial and resurrection was fully sufficient to redeem all men and women, both of that day and in all of time, past, present and future.

And while it can be said by these words in verses 1-6 that we who have received His blessed gift of salvation also have a part that we must play, because we truly are to "work out" this salvation that Christ has "worked into" our souls", the truth is, He also accomplished that in us. And we are told so each time we see reference to this one very unassuming, but very powerful word, "Grace".

"Grace", both the truth of it, and the application that God makes of it in our personal lives is extraordinary beyond measure, a concept and a provision that our ordinary minds will never fully comprehend . . . its length, its breadth, its heights, its depths, its very intimate and all-loving nature.

And though we find ourselves sometimes using the word freely in common conversation regarding one another, sometimes even ourselves, I must conclude, we probably should not. It truly should probably belong to the nature and the character of God alone.

Here, after telling us that as His beloved children and members of His Body there are expectations of us, especially that of unity; He quickly reminds us that He Himself has also provided even that.

We find those same assurances given in 2 Peter 1, where we read how though His divine power we as believers, have everything that we need for life and Godliness. It is already ours, residing within our souls through the presence of His Holy Spirit. All we

need do is allow His blessed grace to freely flow through us and all of life becomes different for us. The natural wretchedness that once dominated our souls begins to change and we will take on new and different beliefs and behaviors, and life changes for us. Those words in 2 Peter 1,

3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:3-8 NIV)

Here in clear and assuring words of promise, God is affirming to us that we are not expected to find our own means of being the people of God that He wants us to be; but that He Himself has already put into our spirits all that we will need.

And so, as we read these words of Ephesians 4 that call us to unity within the Body of Christ, we need have no concern. We have all that we need within us to do them. Listen again . . .

1 I . . . urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 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. (Ephesians 4:1-7 ESV)

Note again these last words, verse 7 . . .

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

Again, this word "grace", such a simple word, but at the same time, having such a profound and widely-versed meaning!

Here, “grace” speaks especially about very special “gifts”, free, unmerited, undeserved gifts, gifts like the one that has gained us our salvation. Recall the words we studied in Ephesians 2.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Here, God’s use of the word “grace” is so very plain; but even so, He lovingly went on to explain the fundamental nature of its meaning by saying to us that the gift of our salvation is a “free gift” from Him and has nothing whatsoever to do with our trying to work to obtain it.

And then, thanks be to God, His “grace” moves on forward, beyond our salvation and flows on into all the many “next things” that He wants to accomplish in us, that “working out” of the salvation that He has “worked in” to us.

And yes, effort, sometimes very strong effort is required of us. But even in that effort, the ability to actually carry it out is through another gift of His grace, enabling us to “do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” (Philippians 4:13)

And as one of my favorite lines in one of my favorite songs refrains, “Grace flows like a mighty river”. And it does, dear friends! And nothing in all creation can withstand its mighty power.

Grace is the almighty, all-powerful “Word of God’s mouth” that we read about in Isaiah 55,

11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

What a mighty and powerful God we have in Christ Jesus! Praise be Him!

May I say of these words that it is painfully obvious to see that very few Christians truly comprehend what God has done for us, and I above all the rest. We read all these words of assurance and hope and promise, and for a moment we rejoice, but then, as we get about our daily activities, we work as if everything is by our own effort.

But in all these words of scripture, Christ is calling out loudly to us, saying “Lo, I am with you always.” “I am with you every moment, giving you strength and character and abilities far beyond anything you might be able to muster. Be at peace, I am with you”.

As the Spirit of Christ spoke these particular words in verses 7 and 8 through this writer of these scriptures, He was saying to us, “I know you personally and intimately. And I

know the plans I have for you. And I will give you the exact “gifts” that you will need. I know what your character and your personality will need to do all the many things that I will ask of you.”

Folks, listen! Just as a doctor must be equipped in order to properly treat our healthcare needs; and just as an electrician needs to be equipped to do our electrical work, and on and on, so also must we be equipped to carry forward with the many spiritual tasks that God will call us to accomplish each day.

And because each of us is different and we each have different “callings”, God’s gifts need always be especially tailored to each of us and to our special “calling”.

And please understand and please accept these words. If you are truly saved, then it is sure and certain that you absolutely do have a specific “calling” from God. And while unfortunately, too often many of us believers manage to muddle our way through our entire life without getting truly engaged in God’s calling for us, we still nonetheless do have a “calling”.

And also, just as sure and certain as our “calling”, so also do we have the special “equipping” that we will need to carry out our calling. God always gives us both sides of His “gifts of grace”, both the “calling” and the “equipping” and because of that, we are truly without excuse.

Listen to these words again in verses 7 and 8 . . .

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. (Ephesians 4:7-8)

May I resay the words that I gave us a moment ago, that yes; each of us is different, with different personalities and different abilities. And we each have different “callings”. And because of that, God’s gifts are always uniquely tailored to each of us. Recall in the Parable of the Talents, Jesus said,

15 To one (the master) he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. (Matthew 25:15 ESV)

And in 1 Corinthians 12 we read . . .

4 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. 7 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)

May I say these words in simple terms for us?

There is a favorite expression used to explain the presence of our ordinary human abilities and talents. The expression is “common graces”.

And each one of us comes into this life with certain of these “common grace, abilities and talents that are especially designed around our personality and intelligence. Some of us are office workers, others are outside workers. Some are leaders and some are followers.

And these abilities and talents are a gift from God to enable us to live and take care of ourselves and our families, abilities and talents irrespective of whether or not we believe in the God who gave them to us. They are given both to the “just” and to the “unjust”, just as rain falls on the “just” and the “unjust”.

But may we be very, very clear in our understanding about the special “Spiritual gifts of grace” that are spoken about here in these words of Ephesians 4. These are not the same as the gifts of “common grace”. These are special and unique, very “uncommon”, and are only distributed to those who have the Spirit of Christ residing within their soul through salvation.

Beginning in verse 11, we will see some of the very special “Spiritual Gifts” that God gives to men and women as they surrender their lives to Him and receive the presence of His Holy Spirit. And God willing, we will begin to study about those special gifts in some detail next week. But before we do that, we need first to study and to understand what Jesus needed to do before He distributed those gifts to us.

Listen, beginning in verse 8!

8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:8-10)

When Jesus died there on the cross, He accomplished a very special victory, one that is beyond all that we might ever comprehend. He took the “captivity” that once so strongly held each of us “captive” and He forever loosened its grip and set us free.

The words given here are intended as a vivid picture of a conquering hero leading captives in a victorious public procession, a public display for all to see that the enemy is now no longer a threat or a danger.

The “captivity” that once held us firmly in “bondage” and “slavery” to the world, the flesh and the devil, has been defeated and put on public display as a shame to all the enemies of God. Those words of God in Colossians 2,

15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (in Christ). (Colossians 2:15)

Again, verses 8 -10 of our text . . .

8 Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:8-10)

There is so much to be learned from these words, but may we address just one of the truths these words convey to us. They speak of the life, the death, the burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, all of the required efforts of Christ as He came to redeem us from our sins.

In His death, He paid the full penalty, the entire debt that our sins had built up against us, and they were many.

Romans chapter 6 provides such an excellent detailed explanation of how we have been set free from the bondages of sin, that as you and I join with Christ in His resurrection, just as He arose and ascended into heaven completely freed from all our sins that He had taken upon Himself, we also are completely freed from them.

These words again . . .

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Implied within these words is the wretched penalty that was required of Him to bear, as He "descended" and took our punishment upon Himself. And He did all that was required. That is why He was able to "ascend" and to take us with Him into His Kingdom. Verse 10,

10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:10)

Thanks be to God for Christ and for His so gracious a gift to us. We are now not only freed from all bondage to sin, we also are filled with all the precious "gifts" of grace that we will need to go through this day and every day in front of us.

Hallelujah . . . What a Savior!

May we close with these words of Isaiah 43 . . .

1 . . . "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you. 3 For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. (Isaiah 43:1-3)