

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org

Gifted, Empowered and Prepared to Serve

by Dan Trygg

“Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah's gift. ⁸ For it says: ‘When He ascended on high, He took captivity captive; He gave gifts to the people.’ ⁹ But what does ‘He ascended’ mean except that He descended to the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ The One who descended is the same as the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. ¹¹ And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the preparing of the saints unto work of service, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all reach unto the unity of the faith and of the true-knowledge of God's Son, unto a mature person, unto the extent of the stature of Christ's fullness.”

Ephesians 4:7-13

In the previous paragraph, Paul had implored these believers to “walk worthily of the calling” which they had received in Christ. We saw that the focus of the apostle's heart was that they learn to work together as a team, ...that they “get low” with humility and grace toward each other, and treat each other with patience, forbearance and love. There is a spiritual unity that God had established, by putting us together in Christ. **He has called us together to become a team.** We start out with our immaturity, misconceptions, “baggage” and “rough edges”, but God wants to develop us into a team that can effectively work together to accomplish His purposes where we are. **It is critical that we jealously guard that “oneness” that is our life together in the Holy Spirit and our joint calling.**

In today's segment, we begin to see what this is all about. **God has not only called us together to collaborate as a team on good works He has for us to do** (cf. Tit. 2:14; 3:8,14), ...but He has gifted us in unique ways to be able to help one another grow. In fact, **WE are the first and foremost aspect of what He wants us to be doing, ...WE are to be serving and ministering to one another**, so that we can encourage one another to understand the truth, develop intimacy with Jesus, and become like Him (vss. 12,13). In order to do that, each of us must be willing to accept this calling and responsibility as being from God. **The enemy wants to keep us apart, ...disconnected and isolated...**, because then the dynamic that God wants to develop that can *most effectively* reveal Him, is hindered and diminished. **We must accept that what Jesus had said, and what Paul is attempting to introduce here, is indeed the primary strategy of God for us, and for His church, to reveal His wisdom and His life to the world.** Yes, there are apostles and evangelists, but the witness of a community of people who love one another sacrificially, and are deeply unified and committed to one another, will provide a more powerful testimony than the preaching of the Word by itself. **The agapē-love of God and the oneness of God at work in and among His people will STAND OUT, creating opportunities for verbal testimony and proclamation of the message.** God will reveal Himself through the lives of His people, ...especially when they work together as the interactive body of Christ. Remember, God intends to make His multi-faceted wisdom known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places through the church (3:10). **The church is on display before the watching world, and before spiritual beings in heaven. It is not so much about what we say, as it is how we live.** I had a friend who used to say, “*Talking is easy; doing is tough.*” He was referring to how so often people don't walk what they talk. Their lives contradict their message. BUT, when the *doing* is clearly evident, ...when people see something unusual, something good, something transformative, and something that goes beyond what people might expect, ...**when there is evidence that God is at work, then people take notice, ...and then it is easy to talk about what they already see, and wonder about.**

Okay, let's dig into the passage. Verses 7 and 8 seem pretty clear. **Each one of us has received grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.** Consequently, the scriptures said, “**When He ascended on high, ...He gave gifts to people.**” That is the basic statement Paul was communicating here. Just as Paul had become a servant or minister of the gospel because he had been given a “gift of the grace of God”, according to the in-working of His power (3:2,7,8), in the same way, each one of us in Christ have been given “grace”. When Christ ascended into heaven, He “gave gifts” to people. In other words, **each one of us has received the empowering grace of Christ, and at least one spiritual gift. This is Paul's introduction to the subject of spiritual gifts and their use in the body of Christ.**

Before going there, however, there is a little bit to clear up. Paul cited a verse from Psalm 68:18 to introduce the notion that Christ gave gifts to people. The verse had a little more to say, however, which prompted an “aside” by Paul, ...even though it was extraneous to his argument. It does give us an intriguing glimpse into another “mystery”. The verse says, “**He took captivity captive**” when He ascended into heaven. Many think this may be a reference to bringing the righteous dead from Sheol into heaven, ...but it is only a passing reference, so we don't really know. The “lower parts of the earth” may be a reference to going to Sheol (Hades) after he died, which Peter seems to refer to in 1 Peter 3:18-22. Again, **this is only a passing reference, not clear teaching, so we must be careful not to**

make too much of what is not plainly stated. Others think that “the lower parts of the earth” in Ephesians 4:9 may simply refer to Jesus’ incarnation, ...His coming down to dwell among us as a human being.

The point is, however, that He “gave gifts to people”. Paul picks up his train of thought again in verse 11. The Greek is emphatic: “*HE (Himself)* gave the apostles, also the prophets, also the evangelists, also the shepherds and teachers toward the “fitting-out” of the saints for work of service unto building-up of the body of Christ.” This was not random, or happenstance. **We receive our spiritual gifts by assignment from Jesus.** In another place, Paul says that the distribution of spiritual gifts is determined by the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7,11). The point is that **WE don’t decide; GOD decides.** This passage states that Jesus Himself appointed some people with these particular spiritual gifts, and gave them their duty assignments. **Their primary responsibility? To equip or “fit out” all those who have been set apart by God (“holy ones”, “saints”) to prepare them to effectively carry out their service.** What is the “big picture”? **What are we all to be working on together, in some form or fashion? ... the building up of the body of Christ!**

If you have been around church circles for a while, you may have heard of “the five-fold ministry”. It is quite clear from the original Greek, however, that **there are really only four categories intended by Paul.** The last two are meant to be combined as one “the shepherds and teachers”. If we used functional labels for these terms, they would be “sent-ones”, “forth-tellers”, “good-news proclaimers” and “shepherd-teachers”. **These are all “word gifts”.** **They all have to do with proclaiming the word of God in some way or another.** Apostles were “sent out” to preach, heal the sick, cast out demons, and raise the dead (Matt. 10:1-8). They seem to be called to the front line to establish new churches, and to represent Jesus in a unique way. The word for “**prophet**” literally means to “speak before”. They receive specific revelation from God to proclaim to people, to edify, encourage or comfort them (1 Cor. 14:3). **Evangelists** are people who have a burden and unique ability to share the good news with people and lead them to Christ. **Shepherd-teachers** are people who are gifted to “feed the flock” with sound teaching, while also serving as guardians, caregivers and protectors. (The word “pastor” is from the Latin word for “shepherd”.) **All of these gifts proclaim the word of God to draw people to Christ, nurture them in their faith, speak personally into their lives, and organize them into interactive communities of faith.** While we *all* are called and enabled to do these things at times, and in some capacity, *these* people are uniquely gifted in doing so. **They are uniquely gifted and empowered to “equip” the other believers, so that we all can grow toward maturity, and find our faith-function in the body of Christ.**

The word for “**equip**” is a broad word. It was used to describe *mending, repairing, adapting, teaching, training, and giving us the tools we need to be effective in our work.* This reflects the reality that we usually come to Jesus with old wounds, emotional damage or immaturity, resistance to change, misconceptions and ignorance of the things of God, and we need to develop our walk with God, discover our gifts, and learn how to minister to one another in love. **Being a disciple of Jesus is an active process of learning, healing, developing our ability to be led by the Spirit, and enlarging our capacity to trust God and serve others in love.** *The church, ...the called-out/called-together community of those in Christ..., is meant to be an incubator for new believers, a healing and recovery center for the broken, a school and training ground for our kingdom work, and a supportive learning laboratory for the discovery and development of new ministry skills.*

WHO is supposed to do the work of ministry? Is it those people who have the “word gifts”, those people identified by Paul, here? **NO!** If you look carefully, you will see that *their* job is to equip *all the saints* to do the work of ministry to “build up” the body of Christ. The work of ministry is to be done by *all of us*, as we are doing our part to love, support and serve one another. The word, “ministry”, has unfortunately been religiously tainted. **When we hear “ministry”, we tend to think of religious meetings, preaching, teaching, counseling, or maybe worship leading.** In the NT context Paul was writing in, *NONE of those ideas would have been associated with this word!*

The word translated as “ministry” in many of our English translations meant “service”. In fact, it was usually understood to be the kind of service of a person attending to the needs of someone else. It typically involved offering support, assistance, care, or even to supply someone’s financial needs. It was often practical hands-on work of a table-waiter, or a caregiver. **The Greek word is *diakonia*.** We derive the word, “**deacon**” from this. In Acts 6, this was the word used to describe the “serving” of food to the widows in the church (vss. 1,2). The church appointed seven godly men to care for this practical need, while the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and the “serving” of the word of God (vs. 4). By this last statement, we see that “word gifts” were thought to be offering practical service to meet needs in the same way as a food distribution, or famine relief (11:29; 12:25). The “service” offered by “word gifts” is just of a different kind. **We are all to serve according to our giftedness and ability.** Those with “word gifts” are not “above” any other gift. *Their contribution is given and empowered by God to offer insight, instruction and revelation that may help all of us in our quest to grow, discover our gifts, and learn how to serve effectively.*

What is the objective? That we all might come to a common, healthy understanding of our faith, ...an experiential knowledge of Jesus, ...and to grow up to be mature in Him, ...even to be filled with the measure of His fullness!