

Ephesians 4:7-12

Ephesians
Getting Heaven Ready

When my 6 year old grandson stays over night one of our favorite times is reading books in bed before he goes to sleep. We have quite a variety of kid's books that we've collected over time.

The other night we we're reading "Tom & Jerry's Party," which is a Little Golden Book, copyright 1955.

The story line is, the cook goes out so Tom the cat invites his friends in for a party. Of course Jerry the mouse joins in. Suddenly the cook is back at the door, everybody scrambles to clean up and hide. The cook leaves, Jerry the mouse has the cupcakes, but he ends up sharing and the party starts again.

I'm not sure why Tom the cat prefers cupcakes to eating Jerry, but the last paragraph of the book says, "So the party started again, gayer than ever."

Now no child in 1955 would have batted an eye at line like that, but this isn't 1955 so of course Anthony asks, "Why did they say 'gayer'?"

He knew the word and I had to give an explanation.

That happens to words. All language evolves and changes over time. Words take on different meaning. But some times, it seems like words get hijacked.

For instance, there are some good words that should apply to every church where the Bible is taught and believed.

Faith Community Church ought to be a charismatic, Spirit filled church. In fact, every Christian is supposed to be Spirit filled.

Unfortunately, because some segments of Christianity have hijacked those terms and given them their own definition, the rest of us sometimes miss out on what God really wants for us.

And yet the Bible is very clear. The New Testament leaves no room for questioning that spiritual gifts are part of God's program for the church.

Now a spiritual gift is a spiritual enablement, or a spiritual capacity given by God. Spiritual gifts are mentioned in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4 and I Peter 4. As we are going to see, each believer has at least one spiritual enablement and their purpose is to equip us to serve one another more effectively.

These gifts are based upon God's grace. In fact, the Greek word for "grace" is *charis*, and the word for "spiritual gifts" is *charisma*.

Of course the word *charisma* is where we get the English word "charismatic."

Charismatics are generally distinguished by speaking in tongues, belief in modern day prophets, people doing miracles, and an experience after conversion called baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Now, every New Testament type church has been gifted by God. Every Christian has a spiritual gift. A *charisma*.

Therefore, in reality, every Bible believing church is a charismatic church. Then you can add to that the fact that God commands every Christian to be filled with the spirit, Ephesians 5:18.

We are all charismatic and we are all to be Spirit filled. It's funny how many biblical terms get turned around and given an improper emphasis until they have lost their actual meaning.

Now because the "charismatics" have taken that general term and applied it exclusively to themselves, many believers have ignored an integral dimension of their Christian experience. We have been gifted by God.

Part of the reason why our churches are at times weak and ineffective is because Christians have ignored their spiritual gift. We've reacted to the error by ignoring the truth.

Ephesians 4, verses 7 through 16 take up the subject of these gifts.

Actually, as we should expect, Paul, the author of Ephesians, is only going to give us a limited amount of information on gifts here.

He's going to tell as much about them as is necessary to explain his overall point. Like so many chapters in the Bible this isn't intended to be the final word on a subject.

We're not going to take the time now to go in depth into the other passages on the gifts. We did that when we studied I Corinthians 12 through 14. We spent a lot of time going into detail about these gifts then. If you weren't here for those messages, we have the tapes in the library for you to listen to.

But here in Ephesians 4 Paul brings up this subject of gifts to make his point which he stated in the first 6 verses of chapter four.

Open your Bibles to Ephesians Chapter 4 pg. 1039

The burden of Paul's heart for the Ephesian Christians is that they would keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; that they would strive to maintain the unity which the Holy Spirit has established in the church.

There is one body, one Spirit, one calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all.

On the spiritual level there is unity. So the plea is that that unity might be expressed on a practical every day level in the church, in our homes, and in all of our relationships.

Last week we got to look at one dimension of that unity and how it should be displayed. Today we want to see another fact and we want to see just how God has equipped us to each have a part in maintaining God's unity in the church. Interestingly, we're going to find out that this unity is based on what Jesus Christ did to get heaven ready for us.

I. God Has Given Each Individual Believer A Spiritual Gift Through Christ

Read Verse 7

Paul begins verse 7 with a word in Greek that can mean "but" and show contrast, but it can also mean "and" and merely be a connective. That's the most common use of the word. In fact 7 other times it's translated "and" in Ephesians.

“And” means it’s a continuation of the same thought. There is one Lord, one faith, One God “and” unto each one of us has been given something that’s imperative to preserving the oneness on the practical level.

What’s been given to us in “grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

The word grace, *charis* has the definite article in front of it. Literally it reads “the grace”

The “grace” that he’s describing here relates to spiritual gifts.

In other words, Paul says “God gave me a special grace enabling me to carry out my job as a servant to the church.”

That’s more than just the grace of God that we all experience. This is a specialized enablement for service. It’s a God given ability to get a job done.

That’s what each believer has received from Jesus Christ.

We’re to preserve the unity and oneness of the faith that puts all believers on the same level and position before God and God has gifted us to see that that happens.

Now, this grace, which is in the form of the enabling and empowering of the Holy Spirit, is given to us “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

Here the Bible names Jesus Christ as the one who gives these supernatural abilities. In I Corinthians 12 it identifies the Holy Spirit as the giver. In Romans 12 it’s God the Father. Each member of the trinity is involved in this process.

Looking at it from the perspective of Jesus, each person gets the grace which Jesus has to give, and each gets it in the proportion in which Jesus chooses to give it. Not all have same gift, not all have same ability, but everyone receives the same grace.

That’s like I Corinthians 12:18 *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*

In other words, all believers in Christ have all been gifted for some of type of ministry to the body of Christ, and our ability to carry out that ministry was sovereignly determined by God.

That means that you have been equipped to function within Faith Community Church. God has given you your position in the body. Christ has equipped you with a divine supernatural enablement. But its as he choose, not as we desire.

Your capacity might be in showing mercy, it might be giving, it might be teaching, admonishing, exhortation. It could be any one of a number of things but God has given you this ability to use to help other believers and it's according to His divine design.

Now you might say, "Hey, I don't think I have a spiritual gift. I don't think I can do any thing for God."

Here's what we know from the Bible. You can. You have a gift. It's just that many times, as Paul told Timothy, that gift needs to be stirred up.

The best way I know of finding out your fit is to familiarize yourself with the gifts in the New Testament and then get busy serving the Lord and watch as over a period of time your God-given gift begins to surface.

So then every Christian has a spiritual gift and it's been given as Jesus Christ has seen fit.

But then how do we know that Jesus Christ has the ability to give out these gifts? Where does he receive his authority? What qualifies him to distribute these abilities?

I. God Has Given Each Individual Believer A Spiritual Gift Through Christ

II. Jesus Is Qualified To Distribute The Gifts Because Of The Victory Of The Cross

Read verse 8

This verse is a quote from Psalm 68 that's prefaced with the words "Therefore he says" meaning God says, or it could be translated "it says," meaning the Bible says. Either one would be accurate since God speaks through his Word.

The setting of Psalm 68 is King David writing about the greatness of God. The Psalm talks about God coming to Israel at Mt. Sinai.

He leads the people through the desert and into the Promised Land. Every enemy is

defeated through the power of God and finally God ascends to His throne on Mt. Zion.

This covers all the victories of Jehovah God from Sinai until the completion of Solomon's temple where God took up residence.

This is the victorious ride of Jehovah on the heights of the battlefields, rescuing the captive Israelites from their enemies and leading them in a triumphal procession to the sanctuary.

Now notice the point of quoting Psalm 68. It reaches back into the history of Israel into the Old Testament scriptures and applies all this to Jesus Christ.

The God who descended on Mt. Sinai and led his people to victory was born as a baby in Bethlehem. He grew up in the family of Joseph and Mary. He ministered publicly for 3 years and then entered into combat with Satan, sin and death and defeated them all.

The gates of hell couldn't prevail against Him. In 3 days after the cross the Lord Jesus ascended to the heavenly sanctuary and sat down on the right hand of the Father.

And as Christ ascended He did 2 things.

#1. He led captivity captive.

#2. He gave gifts to men.

The purpose on this section is to leave absolutely no doubt in our minds about the qualifications of the one who has gifted His church. It's the victorious Christ.

Now what does it mean that Christ led captivity captive?

Read vs. 9

Verse 9 can be taken 2 different ways.

Many modern commentaries take the "lower parts" to mean the earth itself. Grammatically that's possible. You could translate verse 9 "the lower parts, namely the earth."

The translators of the NIV have taken it that way and their translation says “he descended to the lower earthly regions.”

That’s all possible, but I think that interpretation misses something very important. This description of Jesus Christ is going way beyond the mere fact that Jesus Christ was born of Mary. It goes beyond the fact of the incarnation. This deals with the mighty God who has fought the battle and delivered his people. Those who were captive have been lead out.

There’s a triumphal procession that’s taking place. Captivity is lead captive. A victory has been won.

The 2nd major view of these verses takes that victory into account. The early church fathers and the Greek expositions of the early centuries took the “lower parts of the earth” to mean, not the earth itself but “that which is under the earth,” Hades, the place of the dead.

That’s why the Apostles Creed, which many churches recite every Sunday, is worded the way it is. The creed, as it’s used today, comes from around 500 AD and says:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead, and buried.
He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead.

Jesus Christ, in between the time of His burial and His resurrection 3 days later, was active and busy. His body lay in the tomb, but his spirit, or soul was very active. The Creed says he descended into hell.

I’d like you to look with me at some scriptures to see what Christ was doing and why what was done was necessary.

Turn to John Pg 955 Read vs 1-3

This is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible dealing with the promises of heaven. The setting is the Upper Room, the time is the last night of Jesus' life, and the purpose is to bring comfort and give hope.

Jesus disciples are troubled because their master is talking about leaving them.

Jesus is facing death and He's trying to prepare the 11 and so he explains why he's going away. In verse 2 he explains "I go to prepare a place for you."

Jesus Christ was going to prepare heaven. How was that accomplished?

Turn back to the book of Hebrews, chapter 9 Pg 1067

Hebrews 9:1

Verse 11-12 - Christ entered a sanctuary, a holy place with his own blood for cleansing but it wasn't a building made with hands.

Verse 22 – 26 - Through his death Jesus Christ cleansed the true sanctuary. The true tabernacle. Heaven had to be opened and cleansed for believers to enter. Jesus went to prepare that place.

That means that before the cross believers did not go directly into the presence of God. The preparation, the cleansing hadn't taken place yet. Instead they went to a place called "Hades."

The Greek word *hades*, as well as the Hebrew word *sheol* both mean the place to which the dead go. Up to the time of the cross the righteous dead were said to go there, as well as the unrighteous.

The problem is that both of these words are sometimes translated "hell" in our English Bibles and "hell" to most of us is that place of eternal destruction.

Hades today is a temporary holding place for the unsaved dead and it was once a holding place of the saved dead also.

For some Scripture on this look at **Acts 2 Pg 966**

Acts 2 records Peter's first sermon.

I can remember my first sermon. I still have the notes at home. It was very short, very disjointed, and very boring. I know it was very boring because one gentleman, right in the middle of the congregation fell asleep. And it was very obvious that he was asleep. Fortunately the whole thing was short enough that no one else joined him.

But Peter's first sermon wasn't anything like that. It was very logical and you can be sure no one fell asleep.

This disciple of Jesus, who had been crucified there in their city, and who rose from the dead, preached a message on the resurrection.

Well notice the logic of Peter's message. In verse 25 he quotes from Psalm 16.

Read vs 25 -27

There is *hades* in Greek as Peter spoke it. In Psalm 16 the Hebrew is *sheol*.

Peter's argument is this: David wrote, "You will not leave my soul in *hades*, or literally you will not abandon or forsake my soul to the possessing of *sheol*, and you will not allow your Holy one to see corruption, or in other words "to decay".

And Peter argues from this and says, "David's tomb is here and it contains his bones." That means that David wasn't speaking of himself, but rather of his descendant, the Messiah, the Christ.

Vs. 31

Peter reasons: since God raised up Jesus, which we all know to be true, the he must be the Messiah.

And it's interesting that that crowd of Jewish men right there in Jerusalem don't argue that Jesus was never raised. They knew first hand it was true. Instead they were convicted in their hearts and cried out "what must we do?"
There was a resurrection.

Jesus flesh didn't decay and his soul was not abandoned to the grips of *sheol*.

Jesus died on the cross, was buried, and then while his body remained in the grave, He entered the heavenly sanctuary to provide cleansing. He prepared the place for those who were his own.

Then he entered the place of the dead and he did two things.

#1. He made a proclamation

To see that proclamation go back to **I Peter 3, Pg 1078**

Peter is writing about victory in suffering. And as his example he uses Jesus who suffered in complete innocence, but who was vindicated and exalted in the end.

And he says in verse 18... **Read 18 - 20**

Jesus Christ died physically. His body was in the tomb but in the spirit he made a proclamation to the unsaved dead.

The word “preach” there literally means to “make a declaration” and that’s what Christ did.

He appeared to the spirits of all unbelievers of the Old Testament dispensation in *hades*, who were there because they carelessly disregarded the warning of the prophets and had ignored the message of grace failing to prepare for God’s judgment.

Peter has an illustration that draws upon the people of Noah’s day and so he mentions them specifically. Actually they are the perfect illustration of the nonbelievers under the judgment of God because all of God’s patience couldn’t do anything with them, just as it couldn’t do anything with all of the spirits in *hades*.

Jesus Christ became a witness to every nonbeliever bound in the chains of eternal darkness to silence forever the protests and objections of their hearts by showing and telling them that what God has spoken throughout the ages was true.

So first Christ made that proclamation to the spirits in prison and then the second thing He did was he liberated those righteous believers who were also in *hades* prior to the cross.

Now go with me to **Luke 16 pg 926**

Read vs 19-31

Some have viewed this as a parable. Just an illustration that Jesus used that wasn't really true. I personally don't think that his is a parable because Jesus names an individual - Lazarus - something He doesn't do in any other parable.

Also, the parables of Jesus dealt with common every day situations that people were familiar with. People going on journeys, taking care of households, wedding feasts, common events. This story is definitely different than Jesus normal parables.

These are actual individuals and what He is describing is a true event.

Two men died; one righteous, the other unrighteous.

Both wake up in the next life. Both are conscious. Both have their faculties. And both are locked into their particular place.

The rich man is in torment.

Lazarus is in a place called "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom."

This was a description of *hades* before the cross. The righteous dead were with Abraham but they weren't with the Father in heaven.

The heavenly sanctuary hadn't been cleansed yet. But once it was, Christ was able to empty out that paradise side of *hades*, free those who had been held captive, and lead a triumphal procession into heaven itself. He led captivity captive.

II Corinthians 12:1-4 shows that Paradise is now with God in heaven.

What gave Christ the authority to give gifts unto men? What qualifies Christ to distribute spiritual gifts?

There was victory at the cross

Colossians 2:15 says Jesus Christ ...*disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them ...*

See Jesus Christ is Jehovah God. He's the victor over sin and death.

The cross looked like a terrible tragedy. It looked like Satan had finally gotten the victory by using sinful men to crucify the Son of God but just the opposite took place.

Turn back to Ephesians 4:10 This victorious Jesus has ascended to the heights of heaven that he might fill all things. He fills all things in the sense that He is the source of all blessings, the source of all virtues and the Supreme Sovereign over all. He is all in all.

Not only is Jesus Christ qualified to equip his church to serve, He is the only one who is.

I. God Has Given Each Individual Believer A Spiritual Gift Through Christ

II. Jesus Is Qualified To Distribute The Gifts Because Of The Victory Of The Cross

III. One Purpose Of The Victory Of The Cross Is To Equip Totally Devoted Followers Of Jesus Christ

Read vs. 11, 12

Jesus not only gave gifts to individuals but He also gave gifted individuals to the church at large to perfect or mature the saints. We'll look at this more in depth in a future message.

See how this all fits together with the theme that started in the beginning of the chapter?

There is a unity in Christianity, which we're to endeavor to keep, and to do that, the victorious risen Christ has given the ability to each one to serve in the body, and He's given gifted individuals to oversee the process.

We are truly a charismatic church. Not in the sense of being slain in the spirit, or speaking in tongues, or falling under the power, or whatever.

But in the true sense of the word, we all have the ability to add to the unity of this church. We all have a special God-given capacity to serve in some way.

And you know as we look at Jesus Christ the victor, who distributes these gifts, we need to realize that the victory was won on a battlefield.

A king in biblical times that led a victory procession into his capital city distributed gifts taken in battle. He shared the spoils of war with his people.

And applying that to this passage in Ephesians we realize that those gifts which Christ has distributed were all purchased on the battlefield. Purchased by the blood of Christ. What a serious thing it is to neglect those gifts. What a great moral offense it is.

If you or I neglect our spiritual gift and let it go unused or fail to even be concerned about what that gift might be, then we're neglecting something that Jesus purchased with His own precious blood.

What we need to do is get busy for God so that our gifts might surface so that we can cultivate and develop our abilities and use them for His glory.

But then there's one last thing that I think we can draw out of these few verses. And that is that it's also a serious thing to neglect the salvation victory that's been purchased through the cross.

And it could be that you are here today but you have never personally received Jesus Christ as your Savior.

The writer of Hebrews put it this way:

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation."

To neglect a spiritual gift is a serious thing. It will mean shame at the judgment seat of Christ.

But to neglect so great salvation means so much more. It means eternal condemnation and judgment.

Have you taken part in Christ's victory?

You can only be victories over sin, death and hell if you are one with the victor. His victory can be yours - believe!