

God's Plan for Building the Church

[Part 1: Provision for the Church]

January 10, 2003

Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men." 9 (Now this [expression], "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) 11 And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him who is the head, [even] Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

After identifying the characteristics of the worthy walk and emphasizing the unity of believers, Paul moves on to discuss God's plan for building the church in verses 7-16. Paul begins in verses 7-11 by addressing God's provision for the church and in verses 12-16 he highlights God's purposes or goals for the church.

- ***According to verses 7-11 how does God provide for the church? What gifts were given to the church?***

Vs. 7-

Vs. 8-10-

Vs. 11-

Grace:

The first gift mentioned in verse 7 is grace, "*But to each one of us **grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift.*"

- ***Who is the gift of grace given to?***
- ***What is meant here by the term "grace" in Ephesians 4:7? (Cf. Ephesians 1:6; 2:4-9; 3:2; 3:7-8)***

Note: Remember in Ephesians chapters 1 and 2 that Paul's focus was on saving grace. The term grace referred to God's freely giving us a salvation that is unmerited, unearned and undeserved. However in Chapter 3:7-8 the term seems to refer to God freely giving Paul the ability to minister and preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. The use of the term here would be similar to that of 3:7-8 and speaks of an enabling grace given to believers, since Paul is focusing on the building up of the church and in particular spiritual giftedness.

- ***To what extent is this gift of grace given?***

Note: The term "*measure*" [METRON] refers to degree or proportion. In other words a specific portion of enabling grace is given to each believer as determined and apportioned by Christ. There seems to be a similar thrust in Romans 12:6.

Gifts to Men:

Paul goes on to mention in verse 8 that after Christ ascended He gave gifts to men.

- ***First of all, what do you suppose the purpose of verses 8-10 serve in the context of God giving gifts to the church?***

Note: Paul is quoting Psalm 68:18 here as a comparison passage to show how Christ received the right to bestow those gifts to men. Psalm 68 is a victory hymn composed by David to celebrate God's conquest of the Jebusite city (Jerusalem) and the triumphant ascent of God (represented by the Ark of the Covenant) up Mount Zion (cf. 2 Samuel 6-7; 1 Chronicles 13). [MacArthur, p. 138]

Really what is being pictured here is a victory parade. When a king won such a victory as David did, he would bring home the spoils to parade before his people. He would also bring home his own soldiers who had been freed after being held as prisoners. They were referred to as recaptured captives. Paul is painting a picture of a victory parade after Christ's triumphant victory over Satan, sin and death.

- ***What event is Paul referring to when he uses the phrase, "when He ascended on high?"***
- ***What event is Paul referring to when he uses the phrase, "He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?"***

Note: Some have suggested that something else must be indicated by the phrase, "*lower parts.*" However, upon examination of its usage elsewhere in Scripture (Psalm 63:9; Isaiah 44:23; Psalm 139:15), it simply indicates the realm of the created earth. The intent of these verses is not to point to a specific place, but to refer to the depth of the incarnation. Paul seems to be making a striking contrast between the glory of heaven from the created earth. He is emphasizing the extreme range of the Lord's condescension and exaltation.

"Paul's point in Ephesians 4:8-10 is to explain that Jesus' paying the infinite price of coming to earth and suffering death on our behalf qualified Him to be exalted above all the heavens, in order that He might rightfully have the authority to give gifts to His saints. By that victory He gained the right to rule His church and to give gifts to His church. [MacArthur, p. 140]

- *What gifts do you suppose Christ gave to men after His ascension and what do the following passages reveal regarding the giving of gifts to men?*

Romans 12:6-8

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

1 Peter 4:10-11

Gifted Men:

In verse 11, Paul goes on to mention that God gave gifted men to the church. "*And He gave some [as] apostles, and some [as] prophets, and some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers.*"

1-Apostles: The basic meaning of the term *apostle* is simply that of one sent on a mission. In a technical sense the term apostle is used in the New Testament of the twelve, of Matthias, who replaced Judas and of Paul. The qualifications for apostleship were having been chosen directly by Christ and having witnessed the resurrected Christ (Mark 3:13-14; Acts 1:22-24). In a more general sense the term apostle was used of other men in the New Testament such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4); Silas and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:6) and other outstanding leaders (Cf. Romans 16:7; 2 Corinthians 8:23; Philippians 2:25).

2-Prophets: Prophets, like the apostles were also appointed by God as specially gifted men. The prophets sometimes spoke revelation from God (cf. Acts 11:21-28) and sometimes simply expounded revelation already given. In the Old Testament the prophets were essentially in the revelation of the Old Testament Scripture. In the New Testament prophets played a secondary role to the Apostles.

Note: The responsibilities of the Apostles and Prophets were 1) to lay the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20); 2) to receive and declare the revelation of God's Word (Acts 11:28; 21:10-11; Ephesians 3:5); 3) to give confirmation of that Word through "*signs wonders and miracles*" (2 Corinthians 12:12; cf. Acts 8:6-7; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Note: The offices of both the Apostles and Prophets ceased with the completion of the New Testament, just as the Old Testament prophets disappeared with the completion of the Old Testament some 400 years before Christ.

3-Evangelists: These are men who proclaim the good news. The specific term *evangelist* is used only in this text in Ephesians; in Acts 21:8 of Philip and in 2 Timothy 4:5, where Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist. The work of an evangelist is to preach and explain the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to those who have not yet believed. These gifted men are uniquely designed and given to the church to reach the lost with the gospel. The modern day form of this office is not an individual who has 10 sermons and travels from church to church proclaiming the gospel, but might be more accurately identified as a missionary who has been sent out by the church to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. According to Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 all believers have the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers.

4-Pastors & Teachers: There is some disagreement as to whether these should be taken as one or two different offices. The Greek grammar would indicate that these are two separate offices that are

closely related. In particular it is referring to the teachers of the church, which the pastor is one of. All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers are pastors. The term *pastor* here is the normal term for *shepherd*. It emphasizes care, protection and leadership for a flock. While the Apostles and Prophets laid the foundation of the church, the evangelists, pastors and teachers have assumed the role of instructing, leading and building the church. The qualifications for church leadership are highlighted by Paul in his letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Timothy 3:1-7; and Titus 1:5-9).

Clearly God has provided for the building of His church by giving some great and wonderful gifts to His church. We are commanded in 1 Peter 4:10, "*to employ our gift in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" In other words, "Everyone needs to do something!" If you are unsure how to employ your gift in service simply pray and ask the Lord: "*Lord, what would you have me to do?*"

APPLICATION:

- ***How has God gifted you? How can you or have you employed that giftedness into serving other believers?***