

# The Teaching of Ephesians 4:7-13

There are several passages of Scripture explaining various aspects of first-generation Christian life and why they were enduring or (hopefully moreso) enjoying their experiences as they, as Paul put it, were—*by the Spirit*—being built into a temple for the Lord (Eph. 2:21-22); one of those passages, viz. Ephesians 4:7-16, deals with the purpose of the gifts of *that Spirit*, that purpose being to mature them as the church of Christ (also called the bride of Christ, Eph. 5:32) all the way to the point of perfection (i.e. having no spot or wrinkle). (As a side-note here, I won't take time to extensively consider all ten of verses 7-16; I'll mainly focus on 7 & 10-13.) Ya know...

As you read the entire letter of Ephesians, you get the distinct impression that (as with most of the churches associated with Paul) the varied membership seemed to have some conflict along the lines of what existed in Corinth, obviously not to that extent yet, indicating that perhaps Paul was attempting to prevent another Corinth. Well, with that in mind, let's read **3:20–4:16**.

See, Paul had written to them about His desire for the church to incite glory for God throughout all ages, world without end; so it seems obvious by the word "therefore" in 4:1 that he was encouraging them to work hard at preserving the peace by focusing on the foundational ingredients of Christianity designed to unify them in the Lord. Sadly, however, one of the main works of the Spirit to aid in bringing them to perfection—supernatural gifts—could, as Paul had formerly experienced with Christians in Corinth, become a bone of contention among them. So...

In 4:7-13 he took the time to remind them of what I'm sure he had already taught them some-time previously about the purpose of supernatural gifts of the Spirit and how that their purpose was to bring all of them along together as a corporate entity to the point of perfection in Christ; but if they allowed themselves to get caught up in a Corinthian attitude, such could very easily tear them apart, thereby making them spots and wrinkles that would need to be removed from the ultimate bride of Christ. So let's begin our exegesis with...

## **Verse 7: To each of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

Let's discuss the original term translated "grace."

"Grace" here is from *charis* (from which we get our word "charity") and refers to something given of one's own free will, i.e. without any external pressure &/or ulterior motive, hence a gift; whatever that gift may be in a specific text must be determined by its *context*.

There's another Greek word which is very relevant to our study.

The Greek term *charisma* (from which we get our word "charismatic") is essentially a synonym for *charis* because it also refers to something freely given, hence a gift; the difference appears to be that *charis* is more generic in scope, leaving *charisma* to be more specific in scope, meaning that *charisma* is a gift/gifts OF grace. (Romans 12:5-8 fits perfectly here.) Now...

As you likely caught being implied here, *charisma* is the root of the word *charismata* that we hear used often in reference to miraculous or supernatural gifts of the Spirit (e.g. healing, speaking unknown languages, interpreting unknown languages, etc.); in fact, the Greek word *charismata* is found in passages like First Corinthians 12:9 & 28-31 in which all agree miraculous gifts are under consideration.

What's interesting is that since "gift" is the basic meaning of *charis*, then (as is even found in 2 Cor. 8:4) it may be accurately translated as "gift" (or "gifts") in contexts related to *charismata* or supernatural gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit. So...

Though I'm going to come back directly to support this claim, I'm going to say right here that I'm convinced that *charis* in Ephesians 4:7 should be translated as "gift" with the thought of the supernatural in Paul's mind when he wrote it; here are some translations to think upon for now.

*The ExeGeses Companion Bible* reads, "Charism [which dictionary.com defines as 'a divinely conferred gift or power'] is given to each one of us...."

*The Twentieth Century Version* reads, "Everyone of us has been entrusted with some charge...." And...

*The Daniel Mace NT* reads, "To everyone of us a different charge is given...." Now...

Let's discuss the original term translated "gift" in Ephesians 4:7.

"Gift" here is from *dorea* which, like *charisma*, is essentially a synonym for *charis* and refers to something freely given, hence a gift; and the verb *doreo* means of course to present, grant, or give something freely (i.e. without a cause and without recompense). Thayer in fact even stated that *dorea* denotes a gift from a sovereign, which, of course, corresponds to the next verse where it's said that Jesus gave gifts to men.

Since *dorea* is a synonym for *charis* in the sense they both refer to a gift, it's therefore also a synonym for *charismata*; in fact, more often than not *dorea* was used in the New Testament as a reference to the miraculous, supernatural gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit (e.g. Acts 8:20, 10:45, & 11:17). So is that how it was meant to be understood here when Paul wrote of the gift of Christ? Well...

When I read this "measure-of-Christ's-gift" phrase here in verse 7, it reminds me of John 3:34: After the Spirit descended upon Jesus we have John the Baptist saying of Him that—note the present tense—"Jesus speaks the words of God, for God is not giving Him the Spirit by measure"; i.e., unlike the disciples to whom the Spirit shared bits and pieces of information here and there (1 Cor. 12:11 & 13:9), Jesus had all the information God had supplied the Spirit. So from this perspective, what it sounds to me like Paul was saying in Ephesians 4:7 was that...

Each saint in Ephesus was provided a gift (or, as a couple versions I read earlier say, a "charge"), and those gifts were supplied in relation to that which was given to Jesus, meaning none of them possessed all that He possessed, but they all had something He possessed; furthermore, they were being held accountable for their handling of those gifts (at least that's what's indicated in Paul's letter to the Corinthians). Or, perhaps more simply...

Since the next verse speaks of Jesus as having given gifts to men, then the phrase "Christ's gift" or "the gift of Christ" (per many versions) could refer to the same thing, merely meaning that the gifts were given by Christ; Vincent paraphrased it to read as "the distribution of grace by Christ in varied measure to individuals."

**Verse 8:** So Psalm 68:18 states, "**When He ascended on high, He ... gave gifts to men.**"

"Gifts" here is from a very generic term (*domata*) for gifts of any kind, and thus, as indicated by Thayer, may be used synonymously for the *dorea* of verse 7; and "men" here isn't from *aner* for males, but from *anthropos* for folks of both sexes.

Since only the idea of Jesus giving gifts in verse 8 is pertinent to this study, and since verses 9-10 are parenthetical (meaning v. 11 follows v. 8 in thought), I'm going to skip on to...

**Verse 11** (more literally reads): **In fact He gave some \_\_\_ apostles, some \_\_\_ prophets, some \_\_\_ evangelists, and some \_\_\_ shepherds and teachers.**

Translators all recognize that (as with numerous passages in the Bible), for the sake of translation, there are ellipses in this verse, meaning that this statement needs to have the word "as," the word "to," or the phrase "to be" supplied following each "some." So the questions become, {1} did Paul mean that Jesus gave some men as gifts to Christians "as" or "to be" apostles, prophets, etc.? Or {2} did he mean that Jesus gave gifts to all Christians regardless of any standing they had among them? Well...

I've struggled with this various times over the years, and my conclusion is option #2; i.e., we should supply the preposition "to" after every "some," meaning that gifts were given **to** them—to all of them, regardless of their positions (corresponding very well with Rom. 12:5-8); not only did Paul refer to the saints in general in the next verse (v. 12), but in verse 7 he indicated that (just as on him as an apostle in 3:7) gifts of grace were bestowed upon each of them as well. Furthermore...

Especially since Paul chose the Greek terms *dorea* and *charisma*, to choose option #1 and thus to say that Jesus "gave men to men" in verse 8 doesn't make nearly as much sense in the context (e.g. v. 7) as it does to say that He gave supernatural gifts to men ... for (as the next verse says) the equipping of the saints for service and edification of the body. Besides...

It's my understanding that to supply the word "as" in this verse, the article (*tous*) before each group of men should be in the dative case, and they aren't, or for us to supply the phrase "to be" they should be in the nominative case, and they aren't, but they ARE in the accusative case, meaning that we can correctly supply the preposition "to." So...

Between verses 7 and 11 we have something like this: "The distribution of grace in the form of supernatural gifts was given by Christ in varied measure to each Christian, fulfilling Psalm 68:18 which states, 'When He ascended on high, He gave [not men as gifts, but] gifts to men'; indeed He gave them to apostles, to prophets, to evangelists, to elders, to teachers, and so on." So what were the reasons Paul gave for these gifts given to men? And for how long would the saints be in possession of these miraculous abilities?

**Verses 12-13: For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry and edification of the body of Christ until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of God's Son, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.** So...

In verse 12 we note that supernatural gifts were given to each one (per v. 7) to prepare them, the saints, {1} for the work of serving individuals (reminiscent of the work of the deacons in Acts 6:1-7), and {2} for the building up of the body in general (along the lines of what Paul said to them in 2:21-22 as well as in 4:15-16 [cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-5]). Then...

In verse 13a we note that, based upon their function, there was a time-limit for how long God would permit these gifts to last: the Greek word for "until" here is *mekris* which means *as far as or up to a certain point* (Thayer & Strong [3360]); Vincent stated that it specifies "the time up to which" the impartation of gifts were to last. Then...

In verse 13b Paul cited a four-part target which, once met, would mean the end of the supernatural gifts; but before looking at that, let me define the Greek word here for "come": it's from *katantao* which means *to meet, to reach, or, per Vincent, to arrive at as a goal*; intriguingly, this same word was used by Paul in Acts 26:7a, which, by the way, I believe, as I'll demonstrate momentarily, actually corresponds to this context: "To this promise [of resurrection, v. 8] our twelve tribes ... hope to *katantao*." So let's consider the four-part goal or time-target of miraculous endowments.

## The Unity of the Faith

Firstly note that the definite article occurs before the word "faith," meaning that faith here isn't *subjective* faith (i.e. human belief) but *objective* faith, i.e. (per v. 5) it's the or **God's** one, single, revealed faith or His religion, His ideology, His doctrine, His way and truth. (When asked "What faith are you?," say "God's.")

Secondly note that the definite article also occurs before the word "unity," that word being *henoteta* and rooted in the word *heis*, the Greek term for "one," thus (as some versions even read) it's best translated as "oneness," referring to *solidarity* or *togetherness*; in fact, a couple very respected and well-known old translations (viz. the Bishops & Geneva Bibles) employ the word "together" in this verse saying, "till we all meet or come together." See, Paul chose the *objectively fitting* genitive/possessive case, which is why the preposition "of" is correct here: it's "the unity OF (i.e. belonging to or a result of) the faith" or "the faith's unity" **not** "their unity WITH the faith." So...

When Paul said "till we all come to the faith's oneness" or "to the togetherness of the faith," who exactly was his "we all"? And the answer is ... those Peter and Paul said were, at that time in history, being joined together, thereby growing into the Lord's spiritual, holy, and habitable temple (1 Pet. 2:5 & Eph. 2:21-22). See, that was the whole point of the work of the Spirit—to gather together the remnant (Eph. 2:6 & 13 [cf. Rom. 11:5], i.e. the sheep who'd hear the Lord's voice, John 10:27), into one body (4:4) and, via the Word the Spirit was revealing, to purify that one body as a bride for Christ (5:25-27). And once that transpired, then what would be the result? The members of that bride and her everlasting posterity would forever thereafter enjoy...

## The Knowledge of the Son of God.

The word for "knowledge" here isn't merely the word *gnosis*, but *epignosis* which means "full knowledge" or "complete information." Besides that, this phrase, like "the unity of the faith" phrase, is in the genitive/possessive case, indicating that Paul wasn't talking about all the info *concerning* Jesus, but about all the info the Father gave the Son for the Spirit to *reveal*. So...

This revelation—"the faith"—of the Lord &/or the Spirit would be completed simultaneously with the time it had fulfilled its purpose of bringing together all "the called-out ones." Why? Because it not only would've left (and did of course leave) God's new covenant family with all the information we'd ever need, but also those gathered-together called-out ones would finally be...

## A Perfect Man.

The word for "perfect" is *telos* referring to an end-goal. Since Paul actually said "a perfect man" and since he followed that up with "children" (in v. 14), then *telos* here would likely be better translated as "mature," for maturity is the end-goal of "growing" (that which is mentioned in v. 15).

Also of importance to note is that Paul specifically chose a singular concept here: while "children" and "we all" are plural, when speaking about the goal of maturity, he spoke of it in a corporate, single body sense (cf. v. 16). The following phrase defines what Paul meant by "a perfect man," viz. it would be the time when they, although already Christians, would finally reach...

## The Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ.

The word for "measure" is *metron* (yes, as in "metric" or "meter"); Vincent in his Greek studies through the New Testament says that ancients used this term to express the length of an intangible "period of time" (as well as the length of a tangible object). The word for "stature" is *helikias* which can refer of course to height, but can also refer to age since the two are generally related; in fact, *helikias* is translated "age" nearly half the time in the NKJV. The word for "fullness" is *pleromatos*, a synonym for *telos* that refers to "completeness, maturity, or perfection." So, putting all this together,...

Paul would've been saying that, in their growth process as a corporate body via inspiration and spiritual gifts, they were being built up an eternal temple; and when those first-generation saints reached that point when they were at last credited with Christ's fullness (i.e. His perfect righteousness, Heb. 5:8-9 & Rom. 4:24, at the time of their resurrection, Php. 3:8ff), they'd have reached the end-goal (*telos*) of maturity, completeness, or perfection—the fullness God had meant for them all along (Eph. 3:19). Another verse by Paul that clearly indicates that those saints back then were experiencing this growth process is found in Galatians 3:3 where he told those saints that they were "*now being made perfect*." As a bride of those days going through her purification process for her soon-to-be husband, so, as depicted in the next chapter (Eph. 5), the church-bride was going through the same thing with the aid of the miraculous work of the Spirit of God. And...

This all agrees so perfectly to a parallel passage by the same man to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:8-12): "Where there are prophecies, they'll fail; where there are tongues, they'll cease; where there's knowledge [*gnosis*, partial information], it'll vanish away; for we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child I spoke like a child, understood like a child, and thought like a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." So...

All of what Paul wrote about in Ephesians 4:7-8 & 11-13 (as well as 1 Cor. 13:8-12) was for the purpose of which he concluded in 4:14-16: "So that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—by whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does it share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

One thing that seems as clear as can be is that the supernatural gifts of which Paul wrote would pass simultaneously with the time when all revelation—the (objective) faith—had been delivered, at the same time when the bride was whole and prepared for her Groom to be married around the time of the events of AD 70 when the old bride had been removed once and for all time. This makes perfect sense with what Paul wrote in First Corinthians 1:4-8: "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace [gift] of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus [via the Spirit He sent to you], that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ who will also confirm you to the end that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Wow! Amazing how it all fits together. ☺