

## **The True Measure of an Authentic Church**

Scripture: Ephesians 4:7-10

Code: 49-19

We come again to the Word of God and to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians has been a foundational letter for the church in every age since the New Testament time in which it was written, and so we have spent a number of months going through this very, very important letter from the apostle Paul, not only to the church at Ephesus but to every church throughout the history of the church in the world. So much here is vital for us to understand. And we come now to verses 7 to 16, verses 7 to 16 in the fourth chapter.

My curiosity drove me to do a little bit of study to try to find out what the contemporary evangelical church says are the measures of a church's success. And so I read through a lot of material, and I basically came up with the following lists that are offered as measures of a church's success. Things like this: the ability to grab attention; provision of entertaining experiences; money to fund projects and events; large, well-equipped facilities; creative, innovative programs; attractive media; cultural influence; large crowds. By then I was crying for mercy. Those have nothing to do with the measure of a church, and yet they are offered to this generation.

I want to show you what the measure of a church is, how you evaluate a church's authenticity, by having you follow as I read Ephesians 4, starting in verse 7, and I'll read down to verse 16.

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’ “(Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 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. 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 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.”

Now, clearly the highpoint of that text is in verse 13, and there it says that the measure of the church is the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. There's only one way to measure a church, and that is its Christlikeness. Again, that makes the duty of the church, verse 15, “to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ.” The measure of a church is its Christlikeness.

Now we've been talking a lot about unity since the beginning of chapter 2, really. We've been talking

about how important the unity of the faith is, and we see it again in verse 13, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith.” And how is the unity of the faith there described? As “the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” So the unity of our faith is a common Christlikeness.

Remember, the theme here is unity. There are virtues that work toward unity; we saw them in verses 2 and 3: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Those are the kinds of attitudes that it takes to produce the unity of the church. And unity is the way the church was designed from the beginning because, verses 4, 5, and 6 says, “There’s one body”—or one church—“one Spirit . . . one hope . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” Theological unity is the foundation of the church. The church is based on divine truth—common divine truth, the-once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith. That is the foundation of unity. The goal of unity is the measure of the stature of Christ.

So how does this work? How can we attain this kind of unity of Christlikeness? What’s the pathway to that? It may at first seem a little bit contradictory. We’re supposed to be united, we’re supposed to be one, everything about us is one—so how do we express that oneness with so many different people? And the answer is that our unity is found in our diversity. That may seem counterintuitive, but it is precisely the truth, and the illustration for it is down in verse 13. Again, it is “the unity of the faith,” the unity of maturity, and “the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

We’re all headed toward Christlikeness, and it works like a body. Verse 12 ends with the body of Christ. Verse 16 talks about the whole body, the building up of the body, the growth of the body. So Paul’s image here is of a body. Down in verse 16 he even talks about each and every joint and the proper working of each individual part, which causes the growth of the body. So we have a very simple illustration: Body—the body of a human being functions well when all the individual components that make up that body function well. If something’s wrong with a functioning organ on the inside or a functioning limb on the outside or something in the brain, whatever it might be, the body is in a sense of dysfunction.

So we understand the illustration: Like a body, we have to have all the component parts to have one, whole, healthy body. And that’s how the church works. Our unity is found in our diversity. Our unity is found in our diversity. All the various people, with all their uniqueness functioning in diverse ways, contribute to the unity of the church like all the features of a human body contribute to the united functioning of a human being.

So the key to unity is diversity—that’s a popular word these days. And I read an article this week that was very interesting. This from a pastor of a large Southern Baptist church in Orlando, Florida, who was trying to describe the diversity of the church, and I’m quoting: “We [have] a diverse, welcoming, multicultural gathering of people. We have transgender, LGBTQ, straight, single, married, divorced, and cohabitating people. [They’re all attending together. They] attend, [they] listen, [they] serve, [they] grow, and [they] give. We have Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and non-registered people. We have documented and undocumented people. . . . We have pro-life and pro-choice [people] . . . We . . . support the Blue and Black Lives Matter sitting together and serving together. We have Trumpers and Never Trumpers. We have Biden . . . and Harris supporters.” And I was out of breath at that point. That is the most absurd understanding of the diversity of the church that I have ever seen in my entire life.

The diversity of the church doesn't come from collection of sins, personal experiences, and political viewpoints. What is the source of the diversity of the church? Let's look at verse 7, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." To each one of us, as individual believers, grace was given in the form of a gift from Christ.

Now if you understand anything about grace, you know that grace gives, right? God gives by grace. You can't talk about grace without talking about giving. God's grace always gives; it is the nature of divine grace to give. Grace gives what is necessary—what is needed, but what is undeserved.

If you go back to chapter 1 and verse 3, we all understand that grace and peace—in verse 2—have been granted us "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And what does that grace do? It "[blesses] us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace." He graces us so that we will praise His grace and give Him glory. At the end of verse 7, it says that His grace is rich. And verse 8, He lavishes it on us.

Now we understand that at salvation we receive saving grace; this is far more than that. This is the grace of all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. Chapter 2 and verse 5 speaks about us being saved by grace—chapter 2, at the end of verse 5, "By grace you have been saved." And then it's repeated again in verse 8, "By grace you have been saved." That's saving grace.

But go over to chapter 3 and verses 7 and 8. Paul, talking about his call to ministry, said he "was made a minister," in verse 7, "according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ." So he receives saving grace—we understand that; but he also received the gift of grace that defined his ministry. He says, "I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace." And what we just read in the fourth chapter in verse 7 is that God's grace gives every one of us a gift for the sake of the building of the body of Christ. Paul's ministry was a gift of grace.

Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 15:10, "I am what I am by the grace of God. I am what I am by the grace of God—not only what I am as a believer, but what I am as a minister. I was given saving grace, and then on top of that, that saving grace lavished me with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, and on top of that, that grace gave me a gift to function within the church so that I would be part of the necessary operation of the Spirit through the multiple gifts to build the church into Christlikeness." This grace really is God giving Himself. This grace doesn't come to us apart from God; this grace comes to us because God comes to us. And Paul has made that absolutely clear.

Go back to chapter 1 again, at the end of the chapter. We're talking here about Christ, and it says concerning Him, verse 22, "[He's the] head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." So the grace comes because the Lord comes. He fills His church. In chapter 2, at the end of that chapter, verses 21 and 22, it says, "[We are] a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

So in chapter 1 at the end Christ is in us, the fullness of Him. In chapter 2 at the end the Spirit is in

us. Look at the end of chapter 3. And here we find, verses 20 and 21, “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all we [can] ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” And again, this encompasses the whole Trinity. Christ is in us, the Spirit is in us, and God Himself is in us, to whom that very prayer is directed.

Grace is God giving Himself. That’s the idea: You are the temple of the Spirit of God; Christ dwells in you; God has set up His abode in you. And with His coming is not only the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control), the virtues that are a part of the inheritance of the believer by the power of the Spirit, but what comes is illumination to understand the Word of God. But on top of that comes this special grace, mentioned in verse 7 of chapter 4, which grants us a gift, a gift. A gift is literally measured out to us for the purpose of building up the body of Christ.

As part of His self-giving, the Lord gives two kinds of gifts. The first one we’re going to look at this morning is the gifts that He gives each Christian, each individual Christian. Then next week, we’ll come down to verse 11 and look at the gifts He gives the whole church. First, the gifts He gives to every believer, then the gifts He gives to the whole church.

But let’s look at the individual believer in verses 7 to 10. And here we see the divine diversity necessary for unity. Now remember what I’ve said. The subject here is unity. That has been Paul’s theme since chapter 2, and he wraps it up, in a sense, with the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. Then verse 7 begins with, “But”—that’s used in an adversative way. In spite of everything that’s been said about unity, on the other hand—on the other hand we have been given grace, each one of us, in a unique way, so that we function in diversity that produces this unity.

Notice the word “measure” there, “the measure of Christ’s gift.” That’s *metron* in the Greek—metrics. The idea is the Lord gives every believer a specific portion, a specific unit of gifting so that he can contribute to the building of the body of Christ to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. If you look at it down in verse 16, it’s broken down into “every joint” and “each individual part.” The key to unity in the church is diversity—not political diversity, not sinful diversity, not ethnic diversity, not any of that; it’s all irrelevant. The diversity we’re talking about here is the diversity of gifts according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

Now there’s some comparative passages that will help illuminate this for us. Go to Romans 12. And I don’t intend to discuss all of the different kinds of gifts, but rather to give you the big picture. So in Romans chapter 12 we probably ought to start at verse 3, and you’ll see the relationship again with grace and gifting.

Verse 3 of Romans 12, “For through the grace”—there it is, grace again—“given to me”—again, this is the gifting by grace—“I say to everyone . . . not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” Now we had a measure of grace in Ephesians; now we have a measure of faith. God sort of metrically gives us, by grace, a gift, and then He measures out an equal amount of faith to operate that gift. And that’s how you ought to view yourself. You ought not to think more highly of yourself than is consistent with your gifts; you ought to rightly assess your gifts. You need to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to you a gift by grace that can function in the body of Christ to build

the church into Christlikeness by a measure of faith that He also provides.

He talks further in verse 4, “Just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function”—it’s the same analogy, same picture—“so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given us.”

Again, folks, this comes every time we talk about gifts: We’re talking about grace. You don’t earn them; they’re not built into you; they’re not hardwired in your human disposition. I’m not talking about talents, not talking about some kind of manual skill or the ability to do math or something like that. This is a grace gift. This transcends what you got when you arrived into this world, hardwired into the way you were made. This is something supernatural, something that comes only at the point of salvation.

A measured gift and a measure of faith, and we are to exercise that gift according to that faith. So he gets very specific in verse 6, “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace give us”—there’s that grace—“each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” So if you have been given a measure of the grace to preach or prophesy, speak forth, then do it according to the proportion of your faith. Do it to the degree that the Lord gives you the faith to do it.

If you wonder whether you have the ability to stand up in front of a large crowd and preach, but you know you can’t stand in front of three people without becoming a nervous wreck, that’s probably not the proportion of faith you need to operate that gift. So the Lord matches up the power with the gift. So whatever your gift is, you do that. If it’s preaching or proclaiming truth, do it. If it’s serving, then serve. If it’s teaching, then teach. In verse 8, if it’s exhortation, then exhort. If it’s giving, then give with liberality. If it’s leading, then lead with diligence. If it’s showing mercy, then do it with cheerfulness.

So these are not absolute categories of giftedness that could be sort of narrowed down and defined, this is just very, very general: preaching, serving, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, showing mercy, compassion. Those are just broad categories in which everybody is unique. Everybody is like a spiritual snowflake because you’re all different. But those would be categories in which the gifts operate.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 12. This also is a helpful portion of Scripture. Verse 4 of 1 Corinthians 12, “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.” Again, this is the same exact teaching that we saw in Romans and Ephesians. “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God.” Do you see the Trinity there?—the Spirit in verse 4, the Lord in verse 5, and God in verse 6. They’re all resident in the believer, and they’re all operating in the believer to make that believer effective in contributing to the growth of the church. And the ministries are many, and the varieties are many, and the effects are many.

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. And this is how you have to see your gift: It’s for the common good. Your gift is not for you—it’s not for you, it’s for all of us. My gift is not for me, my gift is for you; this is how I serve you. Your gift is how you serve others. It’s for the common good. That’s where you have to understand that your service is vital.

You hear people say, “Well, I love Jesus, but I don’t like the church.” So you think that you possess, all on your own, everything necessary for you to become like Christ—by yourself? That is a sad delusion. You don’t know how much you need one another; that’s why we don’t forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We gather, and we stimulate one another to love and good works. We need each other the same way a body needs all its component parts.

The church is not just to be a spectator event. For many churches it is that: It’s just a show, and nobody has to do anything but show up, give your money, join the party. True believers in an environment like that languish terribly because there’s not an understanding of the vitality and critical nature of people using their gifts.

Verse 8 gives us some suggested categories of gifts: “the word of wisdom,” some providing “wisdom through the Spirit.” Knowledge, also through the Spirit. Faith, people who just operate with a higher level of faith and trust—usually shows up in intense commitment to prayer; that also “by the same Spirit.” And then in the apostolic era there were “gifts of healing by the . . . Spirit,” there were miracles by the Spirit, there was prophecy by the Spirit, there was discernment by the Spirit, there were “various kinds of languages,” and interpretation; but it was “one and the same Spirit [working] all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” So this is how the body works, OK? You come into the body of Christ; the Spirit takes up residence in your life and grants you from heaven, from heaven itself as a grace gift, a place and a way to function effectively in the body of Christ, so that you make a contribution to everyone else so that the body grows into Christlikeness.

We know what the Spirit does. What did Jesus say? “When the Spirit comes, He will point to Me.” And that’s the work of the Spirit in your heart, 2 Corinthians 3:18, as you gaze at the glory of the Lord, you’re changed into His image from one level of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit. So the church collectively is not going to be Christlike unless the individuals in it are Christlike—and that is the work of the Spirit.

Now again, the listing here is not airtight categories, it’s just a general reflection of the fact that there are varieties and varieties and varieties, and here are some samples. There are as many varieties as there are people. You say, “Well, how do I know what my gift is?” It may be the combination of a lot of these various categories. How do you know what your gift is? What do you love to do when you’re walking in the Spirit, and what do you do that gives you joy and blesses other people? And you can follow the prompting of the Spirit in your heart. If you keep saying to yourself, “I think I’m supposed to be a preacher,” and everybody who’s heard you says, “No, you’re not,” you probably ought to go down the box to the next opportunity. But there will be both a confirmation in your own heart, an affirmation in your own heart and in the hearts of all those people who know you and see how you serve.

Again, you lose your life in serving others when this gift operates. That’s how the body works; that’s down in verse 12, “The body is one yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ”—there we are again. The whole idea of this is when the church functions as the church, when it functions in the measure of its gifts with the measure of faith under the power of the Holy Spirit, it becomes like Christ, and that’s the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. And that’s the only way to judge a church: special gifts measured out to us by grace, in addition to our human talents and intersecting with them, for sure, but employed by the power of the Spirit and the measure of faith.

An illustration of the reality of this, in 1 Corinthians chapter 1—I think it’s important because I believe that the Lord gifts people, not just in the body of Christ universally but in local churches. I believe Grace Community Church, the Spirit of God has dispersed grace gifts through this church to every one of you to bring this church to Christlikeness, and I say that because of 1 Corinthians 1. You might have assumed that somehow the Corinthian church got missed, they were so filled with problems. But even with all their problems—and Paul wrote four letters to them; two of them are in the New Testament—he says this in chapter 1, verse 4, “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus”—there we are with that grace again, not just the grace of salvation but the grace, verse 5—“that in everything you were enriched in Him”—and that would be all the riches of grace from Ephesians 1—“in all speech and all knowledge”—oh, now we’re talking about gifts; you’ve been enriched even to the degree of knowledge and to be able to communicate that knowledge—“even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you”—and then this amazing statement: “so that you are not lacking in any gift.” The Lord is saying that to this very troubled church. “The Spirit of God has dispensed among you, with a measure of grace, a gift to everyone and a measure of faith for everyone to operate in that gift, so that the church would become like Christ; you lack no gift.” And it’ll be that way until the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think the way you evaluate a church is whether that church is Christlike because the people in that church, with a measure of grace and a measure of faith, are faithfully serving one another. This is not about a spectator event; this is the divinely designed diversity that produces unity. John Calvin said, “No member of the body of Christ is endowed with such perfections as to be able without the assistance of others to supply his own necessities.” You can’t do it on your own.

If you’re struggling as a Christian the tendency is to stay away from the church, when the reality is you’re probably struggling because you’re not there, and there are huge areas of your life where people need to minister their gifts to strengthen you—when you’re not around. That is one of the most absurd things that I hear: “I love Jesus; I don’t like the church.” You can’t love Christ and not love the church He loved and died to save, and you can’t be a Christian who is effective unless you are being ministered to effectively by all the gifts poured out in the church. And again, if a church is nothing but a smoke and light show and a concert, and you attend the event and that’s it, that’s really never going to produce spiritual growth, and that’s not going to be a church that manifests Christ. So these gifts are inseparable, then, from the presence of the Trinity in us. And when we use these gifts, the sum of them is the church begins to look like Christ.

Now Paul does something very, very special here—back to Ephesians 4. Having said what he did in verse 7, he then uses an Old Testament passage to make his point—and I’ll pick it up in verse 8, “Therefore”—“therefore,” in other words, “connected to the point I’ve just made, I want you to understand that every believer by grace was given a gift from Christ measured out for that individual to build the body of Christ.” “Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’ (Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)”

And I know you’re saying to yourself, “What does that have to do with whatever he’s talking about?” I’ll tell you what it has to do with: everything. This shows us the cost—mark it—the cost for Christ to give you the gift. You can’t take it lightly; that’s what Paul’s going to show us. You may, at this

particular point, not have any functioning role in the church. This will come to you as a shock, no doubt, but the Lord paid an astonishing price to be able to gift you so that you, for the common good, could help build the church into Christlikeness for the glory of the One who paid the price.

So let's go back to verse 8. You'll notice, if you have a Bible that identifies an Old Testament quote, that this is taken from Psalm 68. So Paul is quoting Psalm 68. Now Psalm 68—this is verse 18 in Psalm 68. In Psalm 68 you have what I guess you could call a sort of a triumphant, victorious psalm, the triumphant, victorious psalm—a victory hymn may be a better way to say it—composed by David to celebrate God conquering the Jebusite city and establishing the Ark of the Covenant on Mount Zion. The historical discussion of that is in 2 Samuel 6 and 7 and 1 Chronicles 13.

So when the people of God came into the land, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city, a pagan city. God conquered the Jebusite city; symbolically the Ark of the Covenant was taken to the pinnacle of that city, Mount Zion, and God was the conqueror of that city, and it became Jerusalem. This is what kings did in ancient times: When they conquered, they went to a high point and declared their triumph. And this sixty-eighth Psalm is a triumphal hymn to honor God who conquered the city and ascended to reign over it.

This was pretty common in ancient history. There would be generals who would go out and win a war, and they would come back; and the Romans used to call it a triumph, a triumph parade. The general would come back, and he would bring with him the spoils of victory. There would be whatever they gained of the valuable things in that country, represented by symbols of that value; there would be prisoners that they would bring back from the captive country; they would bring back their own soldiers who had been imprisoned by the enemy and were set free. And they would all parade through the streets of the city to the highest point of the city. That's what they did—that's what the Roman generals did.

It wouldn't be much different for any other nation in ancient times. An Israelite king would parade into Jerusalem in a victory parade, bringing some of the captives with him and some of the spoils, and he would go to Mount Zion, which was the pinnacle. There would be victorious soldiers, and there would be the soldiers that the enemy had taken prisoner that then were recaptured by the king that owned them and had a right to them, and all of this would be a parade of triumph through the city.

That's the picture here. Christ is pictured: "He"—verse 9—"He ascended." "He ascended." "He ascended on high," according to Psalm 68; He went to the high place. Christ did this as a triumphant general. "He ascended on high"—this depicts the triumphant Christ returning from the battle on earth. And what does He do? He brings with Him essentially the trophies of His conquest. It's a picture of the Son of God ascending triumphant to His throne.

But verse 9 says, "This expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?" He can't ascend unless He's descended. And that's exactly what this is saying to us. It's very powerful.

I want you to notice one phrase: "the lower parts of the earth." Before He went "far above all the heavens," in verse 10, He went "into the lower parts of the earth." What does that mean? Well essentially it's a dramatic, dramatic statement. It's used four other places in Scripture, very instructively. It's used in Psalm 63:9, and there, ascending to the lower parts of the earth had to do

with death by murder, death by execution. It's also used—similar phrase—in Matthew 12:40, “the heart of the earth”; and it refers to the story of Jonah, and it refers to Jonah being in the belly of the fish. It's used in Isaiah 44:23 to refer to the created earth. And it's used one more place, Psalm 139:15, to speak about a womb, a child in the womb.

Interestingly enough, those are the only other four uses of it, and they all have a connection to Christ. It's really amazing: He descended into the lower parts of the earth. He was formed in the womb, Psalm 139. He lived on the earth, Isaiah 44. He was buried in a grave, parallel to Jonah in the belly of the fish. And His death was an execution. That very phrase points directly to Christ.

Now why all this? Because Paul wants us to understand the price He paid to be able to gift you. He had to be formed in the womb, live on earth, suffer all that He did, be executed, and be buried in order that He might ascend triumphantly to heaven. And only when He went back to heaven in triumph could He give gifts to men.

He went back—verse 8, borrowing again from Psalm 68—“He led captive a host of captives.” In His descent into the earth, in His life and death and burial and resurrection, He took captive, you could say, the elect of God, and took them, or their right, to heaven. He captured all who would ever live who were part of the elect. He won their right to be brought to God and to His kingdom because they belong to Him.

And then “He gave gifts to men.” He couldn't pass out the spiritual gifts until He entered into heaven at His ascension. Like a triumphant, conquering hero, He goes back with all the spoils. He arrives, and He's honored as the triumphant King, and then He begins to disperse the treasures. The point is this: Your gifts didn't come easy, did they? The spoils that turn into the gifts of grace to each of us were won with a massive battle against Satan and a willingness to bear divine wrath. He ascended and He gave the gifts because He had descended and won the right to be called Lord.

So when you think about the gift that you have, you should treasure that gift. He purchased that gift with His own life, end of verse 10, when He “ascended far above all heavens, so that He might fill all things.” He went back triumphant. His glorious presence and power is expressed in universal sovereignty. But I don't think that's the main idea; I think this is just a repeat of chapter 1, verse 23: “His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” He went back to disperse the gifts that allowed Him to fill all things—yes, of course, in sovereign omnipresence, but more significantly—He fills His body the church with His presence and power and gifts, to manifest His glory in the church. So consider the grace of Christ in giving you salvation and giving you a gift to serve in His glorious church for His honor.

A closing word from Peter, 1 Peter 4, verses 10 and 11. Here's the application: “As each one has received a . . . gift”—“*each one*”—“employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” There's grace again: manifold grace, varieties of grace, have bestowed on every one of us a gift. “Employ it in serving one another”—it's not for you, it's for them; that's your stewardship. The cost was immense to provide that for you.

And then Peter breaks the gifts into two simple categories: some speaking gifts and some serving gifts. “Whoever speaks, [do it] as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves, [do it] as one . . . serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things”—what is the end of this

in the church?—"God may be glorified through"—whom?—"Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Again, Peter understands that the gifts, when they're used in the church in the strength which God supplies, bring glory to Jesus Christ, which glory will redound forever and ever. And he says, "Amen." That's the measure of the church, and that's what we strive for.

Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your revelation to us. So much more to say about this, but this is the starting point for us to recognize that You have given us a gift, and it was a costly one. You have brought us to Yourself, You have granted us eternal salvation, and then You have gifted us for the time that we're here on earth, to build up Your church to be like Christ. That is the measure of a church, so that by that testimony of a Christlike church, You can continue to gather in the elect who belong to You. We are so privileged, privileged to receive and privileged to give—privileged to receive salvation with no effort of our own; privileged to serve, making every effort to use the Spirit-empowered gift You've given to us. All of it for Your glory alone. Amen.

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