

**THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND**  
**THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL:**  
**A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

**(LESSON FORTY-SIX)**

**“THE GIFTS OF HIS GRACE”**

**EPHESIANS 4:1-7**

***1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,***

***2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;***

***3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

***4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;***

***5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,***

***6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.***

***7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.***

Chapter 4, marks an important dividing point in Paul's letter to the Ephesian believers. The first three chapters contain doctrinal instruction, while the last three chapters contain exhortation, or an appeal by Paul, to the believers, to live out the doctrinal truths which he had explained to them in chapters 1-3.

In verse 1 of chapter 4 Paul writes, *“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”* He pleads with the believers in Ephesus to live lives which are worthy of their high calling. He understands that if they were not motivated to do so out of a sense of appreciation for all that God had done for them, there was nothing else that could motivate them.

In verse 2, he speaks of the graces that should characterize the life of a believer who desires to walk worthy of the calling with which he or she is called. He says, *“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”*

In verse 3, Paul exhorts them to endeavor *“to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”* The *“unity of the Spirit”* does not describe an external, physical, man-made union, but an internal, spiritual unity that is produced by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has already created a basic unity in the Body as a result of Christ's work of atonement and reconciliation. This is a unity that nothing can destroy. It is not our responsibility to create unity, but it is our responsibility to keep, or maintain, or preserve the unity that has been created by the Holy Spirit.

In verses 4-6, Paul lists 7 basic spiritual realities, or 7 elements of oneness that unite all true believers in the Body of Christ. These are One Body, One Spirit, One hope, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, and One God. The ground or basis of the Church's unity arises from the fact that there is one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God. All these elements of oneness should have the effect of persuading believers to make every effort to keep, or preserve, or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In the last fifty years, there has been a great deal of emphasis in evangelical churches on church growth, particularly regarding the use of man-made methods to attract people and to retain them.

In **Ephesians 4:7-16**, Paul informs us of God's plan for church growth, not so much as it relates to numbers, but as it relates to the increasing spiritual maturity of the members of the Body of Christ.

In verse **7**, Paul writes, *"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."* In this verse, Paul transitions from focusing on the Church as a whole, to focusing on the individual members of the Church. He moves from discussing what all believers have in common to looking at how believers differ from each other. He discusses variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. He is still concerned with the matter of preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

He uses the conjunction *"but"* to emphasize that his call for unity is not a call to uniformity. God does not expect the members of the Body of Christ to be identical in every single respect, nor does He desire that they should be. Unity is indeed oneness and harmony but it is not sameness in all circumstances, at all times without variation. In the general unity, the individual is not overlooked. God's gracious relation to the Body of Christ as a whole is a relation also to each individual member of the Body. Not one of them is neglected, not one of them is considered to be anything other than His peculiar treasure, and unity is consistent with a variety of gifts and offices.

All believers are one in Christ. All believers are one with respect to our salvation and our relationship to God as His children. But even though we are all members of the same spiritual family, we are not identical. This is the point that Paul is emphasizing. The Body of Christ is composed of different individuals in terms of their race, colour, background, experiences, personalities and natural abilities. As believers, we are essentially one, but in many respects we differ, and we must keep these two principles constantly in our minds. The diversity does not destroy the unity and conversely, the unity does not destroy the diversity.

The question naturally arises as to how our unity, which has been so strongly emphasized in the first six verses of the chapter, may be preserved in the light of this diversity and variation? Paul gives us the answer in verses **7** through **16**. In these verses, he explains how the body of Christ, even though it is characterized by diversity, is held together in unity.

The **Amplified Bible** translates verse **7** in the following way: *"Yet grace [God's undeserved favor] was given to each one of us [not indiscriminately, but in different ways] in proportion to the measure of Christ's [rich and abundant] gift."*

**The Message** renders the verse as follows: *"But that doesn't mean you should all look and speak and act the same. Out of the generosity of Christ, each of us is given his own gift."* Brothers and sisters, grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift, or out of His generosity. The reason why unity and diversity can co-exist in the Body of Christ is because the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is the Head of that Body, and being the Head, He is the Giver of the variety of gifts which are enjoyed by the Church as a whole, and by every single member in particular. This principle guarantees the unity in the diversity! Paul explains this same controlling principle using the metaphor of a human body in **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** (**New English Translation**):

**4** Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.

**5** And there are different ministries, but the same Lord.

**6** And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.

**7** To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.

**8** For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

*9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,  
10 to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.  
11 It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.*

Paul says that grace is given to “every one of us.” The word “every” is a translation of the Greek word **hekastos**: (**hek’-as-tos**), which means, each (individual) unit viewed distinctly, i.e. as opposed to “severally” (as a group). The word refers to the individual members of the Body who were all to be diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit. Here, Paul is saying that unity does not negate the diversity of the members of the Body. Every member of the Body is given this grace in the form of a gift from Christ, the Head of the body. Every believer has received the gift, the divine enablement, the divine capacity to minister to the Body. The following passages emphasize this truth. All the passages reflect the rendering of the **New English Translation**.

### **ROMANS 12:3**

*“For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God has distributed to **each of you** a measure of faith.”*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:7**

*“To **each person** the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.”*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:11**

*“It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to **each person**, who produces all these things.”*

### **EPHESIANS 4:16**

*“From him the whole body grows, fitted and held together through every supporting ligament. As **each one** does its part, the body builds itself up in love.”*

### **1 PETER 4:10**

*“Just as **each one** has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of the varied grace of God.”*

In each instance, the Greek word **hekastos** is translated either as “each of you,” “each person,” or “each one.” Paul says that grace is given to “every one of us.” Brothers and sisters, God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift, and this gift is to be used for the unifying and edifying, or building up of the body of Christ. We must make a distinction between “spiritual gifts” and natural abilities. When we were born into this world God gave us certain natural abilities, perhaps in academics, mechanics, art, athletics, or music. In this regard, all men are not created equal, because some are more intelligent, or stronger, or more talented than others. But in the spiritual realm, each believer has at least one spiritual gift no matter what natural abilities he or she may or may not possess. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified and believers are edified.

We need to stress the point that every single individual in the Body of Christ has a specific spiritual gift or gifts. Do we know what our spiritual gift is? If we do, are we ensuring that we are ministering our spiritual gift in the body of Christ?

How does the believer discover and develop his or her spiritual gifts? By fellowshiping with other Christians in the local assembly. Spiritual gifts are not toys to play with, neither are they talents to boast of. They are tools to build with. And if they are not used in love, they become weapons to fight with.

There are three lists of spiritual gifts given in the New Testament: **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** and **27-31**; **Romans 12:3-8** and **Ephesians 4:11-12**. We will read these three passages from the **New English Translation**:

### **1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11, 27-31**

*4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit.*

*5 And there are different ministries, but the same Lord.*

*6 And there are different results, but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.*

*7 To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all.*

*8 For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit,*

*9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,*

*10 to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*11 It is one and the same Spirit, distributing as he decides to each person, who produces all these things.*

*27 Now you are Christ's body, and each of you is a member of it.*

*28 And God has placed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, gifts of healing, helps, gifts of leadership, different kinds of tongues.*

*29 Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all perform miracles, do they?*

*30 Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak in tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they?*

*31 But you should be eager for the greater gifts.*

### **ROMANS 12:3-8**

*3 For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith.*

*4 For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function,*

*5 so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another.*

*6 And we have different gifts according to the grace given to us. If the gift is prophecy, that individual must use it in proportion to his faith.*

*7 If it is service, he must serve; if it is teaching, he must teach;*

*8 if it is exhortation, he must exhort; if it is contributing, he must do so with sincerity; if it is leadership, he must do so with diligence; if it is showing mercy, he must do so with cheerfulness.*

### **EPHESIANS 4:11-12**

*11 And he himself gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,*

*12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ.*

It is clear that these lists are not identical. Since this is so, it may be that the lists do not name all the gifts that are available. Paul seemed to believe that some gifts are more important than others. The following verses, all reflecting the rendering of the **New English Translation**, indicate this:

**1 CORINTHIANS 12:31**

*“But you should be eager for the greater gifts. And now I will show you a way that is beyond comparison.”*

**1 CORINTHIANS 14:5**

*“I wish you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may be strengthened.”*

**1 CORINTHIANS 14:39**

*“So then, brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues.”*

Paul says, grace was given to every believer according to the measure of the gift of Christ. It is important for us to understand that this is not so much a reference to the grace that saved us, or to the grace that we need for daily living, but to the grace that enables us to exercise the spiritual gifts that Christ gives us. This grace has to do with the exercise of special gifts for service. This grace is adjusted to the kind of gift we receive from Him and the extent to which the Holy Spirit desires to use that gift to edify the Body. The context here is one of service, not of general Christian experience.

It is in a similar context that Paul speaks of grace in **Romans 12:6**: *“Having then gifts differing **according to the grace that is given to us**, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.”*

In **Ephesians 3:7-8**, we have another example of this use of the word “grace.” *“Whereof I was made a minister, **according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power**. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”*

Here, we are informed by Paul that he was enabled to preach *“according to the gift of the grace of God.”* Enabling grace is measured out to be consistent with what is necessary for the operation of Christ’s gift. Each believer receives from Jesus Christ the grace which He gives, and each believer receives this grace in the proportion in which the Giver is pleased to give it. One may receive a greater measure and another a smaller measure, but each one receives it from the same source and for the same purpose.

What is the supreme gift of grace? It is the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ gives the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is the One who gives out the gifts. But remember, it is God’s idea. The source of it all is the Lord Jesus and what He did for us in His finished work on Calvary, in His resurrection, His ascension and ultimate glorification. Christ became the source of all of our diversity.

The Apostle says, *“But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”* It is critical for us to note that he says that this grace is **“given,”** and that it is the **“gift of Christ.”** **This grace was given based on a decision of the will of the giver and not on the merit of the recipient!**

The very construction of the verb in the Greek indicates that the giving was from an outside source. That outside source is, of course, Jesus Christ, the Head of the Body. Every spiritual gift is totally and absolutely given by God and individual believers do not have anything to do with choosing the spiritual gift that they are given.

In **1 Corinthians 4:7** Paul asks, *“For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”*

In **1 Corinthians 12:7** Paul says, *“To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given **for the benefit of all.**”*

It is interesting to note that immediately after calling for unity in the Body, Paul emphasizes that unity is not uniformity, but is consistent with a variety of gifts and offices in the church.