

Notes: *Gifted to Serve* (Ephesians 4:7-12)

Intro: That is a true picture of how the members of the body of Jesus Christ should work in harness together. Paul has just said that there is an underlying unity in the church of Jesus Christ. We trust in the same Savior. We share in the same body. We are indwelt by the same Spirit. But this unity is not without great variety. As in the case of the different members of the same body, we each have received a special gift of grace so that we may be equipped to serve Christ and one another in a variety of ways. The diverse believers in any congregation must fulfill their God given call not only by humbly, gently, and patiently bearing with one another's differences but also by using their God given gifts to serve one another. Using our gifts effectively is helped by knowing...

#1 Received through Christ's Victory. What a striking contrast verses 6 and 7 present! Vs. 6 speaks of God as Father of *all*, who is over *all* and through *all*. Vs. 7 however says "grace was given to each one of us." "all of us" has given way to "each of us" and so from unity to diversity. Why? Paul is qualifying what he said about church unity. There is only one body, faith and family of God but our uniformity is not colorless. On contrary the church should exhibit a healthy diversity. Christ has given each of us different gifts for the enrichment of our common life. This God given diversity far from destroying church unity, will, if joined to humility, gentleness, and patience promote it. Such service is itself the gift of our Lord's victory as our triumphant warrior which Paul alludes to by quoting Psalm 66:18 in vs. 8. In the ancient world a conquering general might be given a "triumph" in honor of his victories. He would ride through the capital city of his nation in a great choreographed procession, his glorious chariot proceeded by vast numbers of prisoners of war and wagons bearing the booty of victory. Following the triumph, the spoils of victory would be distributed to the people. Psalm 68 which Paul refers to pictures God in such terms. The Psalm celebrated the bringing of the ark of God (symbolizing God's presence) to Jerusalem. It pictures the Lord as victorious over his and Israel's enemies and of ascending his throne to receive gifts and worship from all men. How marvelously this Psalm anticipated Christ's ascension (Acts 1:8ff). On the cross, our Lord defeated our spiritual enemies which had bound us in sin. But now he has ascended into the highest where he received gifts for his church and these he gave to the church on the day of Pentecost, ten days after his ascension (Acts 2). Pentecost was Christ's Triumph Day when he poured out spiritual gifts on the citizens of his kingdom and soldiers of his cross. One sign of his victory is the widespread use of his gifts in a congregation. Two applications follow: Each has been given a gift. By the word "grace" we are reminded that whatever gifts we have are not the product of our own skill or ingenuity. Let us use them with grateful humility. Further let us not despise our gifts either. Each must give according to his gifts. Every member ministry is the NT ideal. Church overseers should not restrict informal ministries but rather encourage them. And those who minister informally should not be defiant but should humbly accept overseers to direct their ministries in ways that are orderly and edifying.

#2: Exercised by Christ's Sufficiency. Significantly Paul refers to spiritual gifts here by the Greek word *charis* (meaning the grace of Christ) rather than *charisma* (meaning the grace of God's Spirit). One soul fortifying implication is that we must exercise our gifts in dependence upon Christ's sufficient grace working in us. This is strengthened by vv. 9-10. Serving in God honoring ways is taxing and wearisome at times (in some locations it involves us in suffering persecution). How encouraging that Christ descended and ascended "that he might fill all

things”—that he might indwell and fill us with his all sufficient empowering presence! We must serve by faith in Christ’s all sufficient humiliation for us. Christ humbled himself by becoming a man, a servant, and a sacrifice for our sins (Phil 2:7ff). Let us trust in Christ’s humiliation to reconcile us to God but let us also trust in it as the guarantee of everything we need for our service of God and others (Rom 8:32). We must serve by faith in Christ’s all sufficient exaltation for us. Not only was Christ raised from the dead but he is exalted in heaven. He sits at the Father’s right hand with all authority and our Father has given “him as head over all things to the church which is his body” (1:21-22). In all your trying service to God find fresh strength by faith in your all sufficient Savior who says “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9). You will discover his indwelling power in your weakness.

#3: Intended for Christ’s Purpose. The purpose for our Lord’s victory and sufficiency is so that his people may be equipped to build one another up. How? Biblical instruction. Each of the four foundational gifts Paul lists in vs. 11 involve teaching. Basic to the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry is biblical preaching and teaching. Stott: “Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God’s church in every age than an ample supply of God –gifted teachers.”