

Ephesians 4:7-13¹

***Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other.*

This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed above and the notes given below.

2. The preservation of unity ([4:7-16](#))

⁷However, he has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ. ⁸That is why the Scriptures say,

“When he ascended to the heights,
he led a crowd of captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world.

¹⁰And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.

¹¹Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹²Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Notes**[4:7](#)**

However, he has given each one of us a special gift.—“However” marks a contrast with what precedes it. “Special gift” is a translation of the word “grace” (*charis* [^{TG}<[G5485](#)>, ^{ZG}5921]). This indicates that the spiritual gift is an act of God’s grace.

through the generosity of Christ.—Lit., “according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” The literal sense makes it clear that a certain measure is given to each. This does not imply, however, that God lacked some degree of generosity with certain people.

[4:8](#)

That is why the Scriptures say.—Lit., “therefore, it says.” The NLT’s use of the plural “Scriptures” might lead to the impression that there are several references, whereas the use of the singular, “Scripture,” would allow for reference either to a single verse, several verses, or the whole Bible. Also, the singular is more consistent with the NLT’s use of the singular pronoun “it” in [4:9](#), which refers back to “Scriptures” in the present verse.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 81-87.

he led a crowd of captives.—Lit., “he captured the captives.” Who were the captives? There are two interpretations. (1) They were the enemies of Christ, namely, Satan, sin, and death, and they were defeated by Christ’s death (Eadie 1883:288; Abbott 1897:113); or (2) they were captives of Satan, sin, and death that were taken captive by Christ through his redemption and now are his followers (Hendriksen 1967:191; O’Brien 1999:292-293; Hoehner 2002:529-530). The second view is favored by the NLT by its translation “crowd of captives.”

[4:9](#)

Notice that it says “he ascended.”—Lit., “Now what is the ‘he ascended?’” In other words, what does “he ascended” mean? The NLT is a good rendering, for it draws one’s attention to those words.

Christ also descended to our lowly world.—There is an ongoing debate about the prepositional phrase *eis ta katōtera merē tēs gēs* (cf. *katōteros* [^{TG}<G2737>, ^{ZG}3005] “lower parts”) “unto the lower parts of the earth.” Some would interpret the genitives as comparative genitives with reference to parts lower than the earth or under the earth, that is, Christ’s descent into Hades (Ellicott 1884:85; Robinson 1903:96, 180). Others, including the translators of the NLT, would view the genitives as appositional, signifying “the lower parts, namely, the earth” (Eadie 1883:293-294; Best 1998:386; O’Brien 1999:295-296). Still others would view them as possessive genitives rendering them “the earth’s lowest part, the grave” (John Chrysostom, *Ephesians* 4:9-10; PG 62.81-82; O’Brien 1999:295-296). More discussion of this follows in the commentary.

[4:10](#)

the one who ascended higher than all the heavens.—This is a good rendering. Most translations (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NEB, NRSV) render the adverb (used as an improper preposition) “far above,” but this is an unusual meaning for the word.

[4:11](#)

the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.—In Greek these gifted persons are listed as predicate accusatives; it is best translated “some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers.” This brings out the distinction that each gifted person has a particular function among the assembly of believers and is to function in the measure of the gift given (4:7). This verse begins a sentence that does not end until 4:16, making it the seventh of the eight long sentences in this epistle (cf. [1:3-14](#), [15-23](#); [2:1-7](#); [3:2-13](#), [14-19](#); [4:1-6](#), [11-16](#); [6:14-20](#)) with 125 words.

[4:12](#)

Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church.—Lit., “for the equipping of the saints to the work of the ministry to the building up of the body of Christ.” The task is to determine the relationship between the three prepositional phrases introduced by the prepositions *pros... eis... eis* [^{TG}<G4314>/<G1519>, ^{ZG}4639/1650]. Most likely the first preposition gives the purpose to the main verb in 4:11 (“gave”), the second preposition depends on the first preposition, and the third preposition depends on the second. This signifies that the first preposition expresses the immediate purpose while the second and third prepositions signify the goal. The progression indicates that Christ gave gifted people to the church for the immediate purpose of equipping all believers with the goal of preparing them for the work of the ministry, which in turn has the final goal of building up the body of Christ.

Commentary

After establishing the basis of the unity (4:1-6), Paul now examines the means of preserving the unity of the body—namely, by means of the various gifts given to the church (4:7-16). In this section Paul explains the giving of the gifts (4:7-10) and their distribution among the believers (4:11-16).

First, Paul states that each believer is sovereignly and graciously given a gift or gifts. Such gifts are not, as some think, limited only to church leaders. We know this because Paul begins with the adversative conjunction *de* [^{TG}<G1161>, ^{ZG}1254], translated “however”; it marks a contrast with the preceding verses, which refer to the church as a whole. The contrast signals that Paul was shifting from the “all” in 4:6 to the particular “each one of us” in 4:7. This indicates that every individual is included; no one is excluded. The gifts are not only for the leaders of the assembly. The gifts are specific “enablements” or “endowments” given to each believer to empower them for ministry. These gifts are closely connected with *charisma* [^{TG}<G5486>, ^{ZG}5922] (gift), which is used in the parallel passage on gifts (1 Cor 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). Moreover, in Romans 12:6, Paul places these two terms side by side in the passage on spiritual gifts. The present text clearly indicates that God gives each individual a specific ability that is to be used to minister for his glory.

As indicated in the notes above, the next prepositional phrase is literally translated “according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” This denotes that God not only gives each believer a gift; he also determines the amount of the gift. The term “gift,” already used in 3:7, means something graciously given by God. The source of this gift is clearly Christ. The “measure” (*metron* [^{TG}<G3358>, ^{ZG}3586]) of the gift carries significant import. It is used three times in the present passage (4:7, 13, 16). Compare the similar word *analogia* [^{TG}<G356>, ^{ZG}381] (proportion) in the parallel passage on spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6-8), where Paul states that gifts differ according to the grace given and are to be used accordingly, no more and no less. It follows that since the gift is measured out by Christ, there should be no jealousy within the body.

And now, we need to turn our attention to Paul’s use of the Old Testament to validate the giving of gifts (4:8). Most scholars think that Paul was quoting from Psalm 68:18, with two major and four minor variations. The two major changes are the changes of both verbs from the second person singular “you ascended” to the third person singular “he ascended” and the change of the action of the last verb from the receiving of gifts from people (the defeated foes) to the giving of gifts to people (the believers). Much has been written in an attempt to reconcile the variations mentioned above. There have been two basic approaches. One view is that Paul altered the text of Psalm 68:18 to bring out its full meaning (Eadie 1883:83). The problem with this view is that instead of giving it a full meaning, it changes the meaning. Others suggest that Paul’s replacement of “receive” with “give” resulted from his use of the Old Testament textual tradition found in the Targum (Lincoln 1990:242-243). Since the Targumist perceived that the “gifts” referred to the words of the law, he rendered the difficult expression “you received gifts from among people” in a way that he considered more appropriate to God’s majesty, “you gave them as gifts to the sons of men.” This was accomplished by a simple transposition of Hebrew consonants from *lqkh* (to receive) to *khlq* (to give). The Midrash (commentary) on Psalm 68 has the same interpretation. The problem with this rendering is that the Targum and Midrash are dated no earlier than fourth or fifth century AD, though some think they represent a pre-Christian interpretation.

However, it is possible that Paul did not cite a particular verse of the psalm; rather, he may have been summarizing the entire psalm using many words similar to those of Psalm 68:18. This approach is analogous to a news reporter who summarizes a thirty-minute speech in just two or three sentences. This psalm of victory portrays God as victor over the enemies of his people; he receives the spoils of victory, which he then disperses to his people Israel. The point is made that the victor has the right to give gifts to those who are joined with him. The proponents of this view assert that Paul applied this to the church in that Christ had victory over his enemies—namely, Satan, sin, and death—and gives gifts of the Spirit

to those who have been identified with him. The problem with this view is that Christ does not receive gifts from defeated foes (as is stated in [Ps 68](#)), for such would be useless to God and his children. Consequently, those who were held in bondage to Satan, sin, and death have been freed and have obtained the gifts of the Spirit from their victorious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Another way to look at Paul's use of [Psalm 68](#) is that Paul was interpreting it for believers in this age ([4:9-10](#)). His interpretation revolves around two verbs from the psalm—namely, “ascended” (expounded in [4:9-10](#)) and “gave” gifts (discussed in [4:11-16](#)). Paul's discussion of the first word, “ascended” in [4:9-10](#) is somewhat parenthetical because the main theme in the context is the giving of gifts. Nevertheless, these two verses are important in order to establish that after his descent to the earth Christ ascended as victor over the enemy, thus giving him the right to give gifts. There has been some debate over the meaning of “ascent” and “descent” in this verse. The traditional interpretation views the “descent” as a reference to Christ's descent from heaven to earth at the time of his incarnation and the “ascent” as a reference to his ascent from earth to heaven after the Resurrection.

Others suggest, however, that the descent refers not to Christ's descent at the Incarnation but to his descent at Pentecost to give his spiritual gifts to the church (Caird 1976:74-75; Harris 1996:143-159; Lincoln 1990:242-244). This is parallel to the rabbinic tradition that associates [Psalm 68](#) with Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai to “capture” the words of the Torah (in connection with the feast of Pentecost) and his descent from Mount Sinai to distribute to the people the “gifts” of the Torah. This view has not gained wide acceptance for the following reasons: (1) It assumes that the recipients of this letter (most of whom were Gentiles) would have had a necessary acquaintance with rabbinic traditions. Furthermore, though some elements of the rabbinic material may be dated in the first century, much of it is fifth century AD or later. (2) In [Acts 2:33](#) there is mention of Jesus' exaltation, reception of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and the outpouring of the Spirit, but there is no mention of the giving of gifts (*domata* [^{TG}<[G1390](#)>, ^{ZG}1517]) as noted in the present context and in the psalm (Ps 67:19, LXX). (3) In the present context, the descent occurs before the ascent. The next verse makes this clear. If the ascent preceded the descent, [4:10](#) is meaningless. (4) In the present context, the same person descended and ascended, whereas this proposed interpretation views Christ's descent as the descent of the Holy Spirit. (5) The climax of Christ's activity is his ascension, since it is at that time that he fills all things ([4:10](#)), which includes filling the universe with the message of Christ by means of the messengers on whom he has bestowed the gifts. Thus, the traditional view that Christ's descent was at the incarnation and that he ascended to heaven shortly after his resurrection better fits with this passage.

The place to which Christ descended is delineated by the following prepositional phrase, *eis ta katōtera merē tēs gēs* (cf. *Katōteros* [^{TG}<[G2737](#)>, ^{ZG}3005], “lower parts”). As noted above (see note on [4:9](#)), this phrase is problematic. Below I discuss three views regarding its meaning.

The first view assumes the genitive *tēs gēs* (cf. *Gē* [^{TG}<[G1093](#)>, ^{ZG}1178], “earth”) is a comparative genitive denoting the “lower parts” as lower than the earth or beneath the earth; thus, the statement would refer to Christ's descent into Hades. This is the view put forth in the Apostles' Creed. Support for this view is seen in the next verse, where it states that Christ ascended above all the heavens, and in [1 Peter 3:19](#), where it suggests that between the time of Jesus' death and resurrection he preached to the departed spirits in this region. Most scholars question this interpretation for the following reasons. First, there is no indication that Jesus ascended from Hades, but there are references to his ascension from the earth ([John 8:21-23](#); [16:28](#)). Second, no time is suggested as to when Jesus would have gone to Hades. Third, the place where Jesus gained victory over Satan and sin was not Hades but the Cross ([2:16](#); [Col 2:14-15](#)) where he said, “It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)). Fourth, in Ephesians the warfare with the satanic forces does not happen in Hades but in the heavenly realms ([1:20-21](#); [2:2](#); [6:12](#)). Fifth, there is no specific mention of Hades (*hadēs* [^{TG}<[G86](#)>, ^{ZG}87]) or the abyss (*abussos* [^{TG}<[G12](#)>, ^{ZG}12]) in this passage, which would serve to verify that it was the intended meaning.

The second view regards the genitive as appositional, signifying “the lower parts, namely, the earth”; therefore, this is a reference to Christ’s incarnation. This interpretation is supported first by the fact that Jesus’ descent from heaven is always viewed as being to earth and not to Hades ([John 3:13](#); [6:62](#); [16:28](#)) and second by the fact that there is no indication in the Gospels that after the burial of Jesus he went to Hades, even during the fifty days between his resurrection and ascension.

The third view understands the genitive as possessive; it indicates that Christ descended into “the earth’s lower part” [i.e., the grave]. This interpretation includes both Christ’s incarnation and his death by which he won the victory over Satan and sin. His burial substantiates his death. In support of this view, it makes good sense of the comparative adjective *katōtera* [^{TG} <G2737>, ^{ZG} 3005] (lower), signifying the earth’s lower part, namely, the ground. Also, it is parallel with [1:20](#) in that the death of Christ ([1:20](#); [2:16](#); [5:2](#), [25](#)) is connected with his resurrection ([1:20-23](#); [2:5](#)) and not with his incarnation nor with a descent into Hades. Finally, it uses the same construction as in [Psalm 63:9](#), where David speaks of the depths of the earth with reference to the grave. In conclusion, of the three views mentioned, it seems that the first view, denoting Hades, is unlikely, and either the second or third view is likely correct, with preference for the last view because it makes good sense and has the fewest problems.

[Verse 10](#) makes it clear that the Christ who descended also ascended. The destination of his ascension was “higher than all the heavens” for the purpose that he might fill all things. What does it mean to fill all things? It is unlikely that this filling is limited to the church; otherwise, Paul would have made the church the sole object of the filling. Also, it is unlikely that it refers to the Lutheran doctrine of the ubiquity or omnipresence of Christ’s body. More likely, the object of Christ’s ascension was to allow him to enter into a sovereign relationship with the whole world and in that position have the right to bestow gifts on whomever he wills. According to [1:23](#), Christ is filled with God’s fullness, and Christ fills the church with that fullness. According to [1:10](#), Christ, the head of all of the universe, unites all things under his headship ([1:22](#)) and fills the universe with the message of redemption through the messengers on whom he has granted the gifts as he willed ([4:7-8](#), [11](#)). Hence, Christ, as victor over Satan, sin, and death, grants gifts to the redeemed, who then can minister in his power.

The next portion ([4:11-16](#)) explains the distribution of the gifts—this is a return to the central point of this section introduced in [4:7](#). In regards to the distribution of the gifts, Paul indicates the persons involved ([4:11](#)), the process ([4:12](#)), the product ([4:13](#)), and their purpose ([4:14-16](#)). The first verse in this section provides a commentary on the second part of the citation of [Psalm 68](#) in [Ephesians 4:8](#)—namely, Christ’s bestowal of gifts to the church. Whereas [4:7](#) speaks of gifts given to each believer, [4:11](#) speaks of the gifted people—that is, the people who have the gifts. But before we take a look at those delineated in this verse, some preliminary items should be noted. First, the order of the list of gifts is similar to [1 Corinthians 12:28](#). Second, though there is no mention of the Holy Spirit, his involvement can be assumed since this passage in many ways corresponds to the text concerning the gifts of the Spirit in [1 Corinthians 12:4-11](#), [28](#). Third, this is a list of gifts and not offices. Interestingly, the term “office” is never used in the New Testament in connection with the gifts. There are distinctions between the gift and the office. (1) Offices seem to be limited to apostles ([Acts 1:21-25](#)), elders ([1 Tim 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-11](#)), deacons ([Acts 6:1-6](#); [1 Tim 3:8-13](#)), and possibly deaconesses (depending on one’s interpretation of [Rom 16:1](#) and [1 Tim 3:11](#)). (2) Those who obtain any of these offices are either appointed ([Acts 14:23](#); [Titus 1:5](#)) or elected ([Acts 1:26](#); [6:3](#); [1 Tim 3:1-13](#)) based on qualifications, whereas the gifts are sovereignly bestowed by God ([4:7](#); [Rom 12:6](#); [1 Cor 12:11](#), [18](#), [28](#)). (3) Everyone has a gift ([4:7](#); [1 Cor 12:7](#), [11](#); [Rom 12:4](#)), but not every one has an office. (4) Marital status is mentioned for the offices of elders and deacons ([1 Tim 3:2](#), [4-5](#), [12](#); [Titus 1:6](#)), but no such qualification is mentioned for those gifted. The office of either an elder or deacon appears to require a married person, never divorced, whereas there is no such restriction on those given gifts. Hence, a person who has a change in marital status does not lose his or her gift. (5) Those holding office cannot be novices ([1 Tim 3:6](#), [10](#); [Titus 1:8-9](#)), whereas the gifts are given to each person regardless of age or maturity. (6) Some offices have a gender distinction (e.g., an elder must be the husband of one wife—[1 Tim 3:2](#)), whereas those who have

gifts may be of either gender (e.g., [Acts 21:9](#); [1 Cor 11:5](#)). Inexplicably, most commentators mix gift and office, yet they are not confused in the New Testament. Clearly there is nothing in the present context about an office.

As previously noted, in [4:7](#), Paul emphasized the gifts given to believers, but in [4:11](#) he depicts those given these gifts. There is no contradiction here because the person who receives a gift is a gifted person. This is analogous to [1 Corinthians 12](#), where he lists the gifts and in the same context talks about the gifted people (cf. [4:4-12](#)). This is again true in the other passage regarding gifts ([Rom 12:4-8](#)). In all three passages the verb *didōmi* [^{TG}<G1325>, ^{ZG}1443] (give) is used to indicate that it is a gracious gift of God to the church.

In this passage the first gifted persons mentioned are “apostles.” An apostle was Jesus Christ’s official delegate with the task of authoritatively proclaiming Christ’s message in oral and written form and of establishing and building up churches. In the commentary on [2:20](#) there was mention of three kinds of apostles: those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and had witnessed his resurrection ([Acts 1:21-22](#)), Paul, who was born at the wrong time ([1 Cor 15:8-9](#)), and those who received the gift of apostleship. The first two categories refer to an office whereas the last, the gift of apostleship, is discussed in the present context.

Some of the apostles who were not a part of the Twelve who had been with Jesus in his ministry or witnessed his resurrection were Barnabas ([Acts 14:4, 14](#); [1 Cor 9:5-7](#)), Apollos ([1 Cor 4:6, 9](#)), and probably Epaphroditus ([Phil 2:25](#)) and Andronicus and Junia ([Rom 16:7](#)). These had the gift of apostleship. The main function of an apostle is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others ([Rom 15:20](#)). They are God’s messengers who open up new territories for Christ.

The second gifted person, the prophet, is also mentioned in [1 Corinthians 12:28](#) and [Romans 12:6](#). Here, as elsewhere ([2:20](#); [3:5](#); [1 Cor 12:28-29](#)), the prophets are listed after apostles, indicating that they are New Testament prophets rather than Old Testament prophets. In studying the term “prophet” in [Ephesians 2:20](#) and [3:5](#), it was concluded that the prophet was one who was endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purposes of edification, comfort, and encouragement (cf. [1 Cor 14:3, 31](#)); it was the prophet’s task also to understand and communicate the mystery and revelation to the church ([1 Cor 12:10](#); [13:2](#); [14:23, 30-31](#)). The prophetic gift may have, at least initially, included a predictive element ([1 Thess 3:4](#); [4:6, 14-18](#)). In light of the fact that in the time of the early church the Canon was incomplete, the prophet may well have received revelation to complete what was needed so that every person could be presented perfect before God ([4:12](#); [Col 1:28](#)). In the present verse, the prophets are listed with the gifted persons who prepare the believers for ministry and build up this new body, the church. Although there may be overlapping functions with other gifts, it seems that the apostles were given a divine commission to a specific task of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and building up churches, whereas the prophets were primarily communicating divine revelation.

The third gifted person is the evangelist. The term occurs only two other times in the New Testament: as a designation for Philip ([Acts 21:8](#)), and as a description for the kind of ministry Paul exhorted Timothy to perform ([2 Tim 4:5](#)). Whereas the prophets spoke as the occasion required revelation, evangelists continually spoke the message of Christ’s salvation. Their function resembles that of modern missionaries, who bring the message to new territories. In the early days of the church, Philip proclaimed Christ’s message on a journey between Jerusalem and Gaza, where he met the Ethiopian eunuch and explained the message of Jesus to him. Philip continued his ministry in various places from Azotus to Caesarea ([Acts 8:26-40](#)). In conclusion, the evangelist’s ministry was to win converts to the faith, the apostles was to establish churches, and the prophets was to bring revelation as needed for believers. Some of these functions may overlap.

Because only one article is used for “pastors” and “teachers,” there has been debate as to whether or not two different gifted persons are intended (Calvin 1965:179; Schnackenburg 1991:181-182) or one person with a combination of two gifts (Eadie 1883:304-306; Barth 1974:438-439). In [2:20](#), there is only one article used for apostles and prophets, which are clearly different roles; therefore, the article here does not require that pastors and teachers be seen as identical. Rather, one is possibly a subset of the other—namely, all pastors are teachers though not all teachers are pastors. The term “pastor” means “shepherd” and is sometimes used metaphorically as “leader” of people. As a shepherd cares for his flock, so a pastor cares for his people by exhorting, comforting, and leading them in the things of God. Again, it is important to note that this term refers to a gift and does not refer to an office, as is so commonly misunderstood today. The “teacher” is the one who instructs, not only in doctrinal matters and skills, but also in moral evaluation. Jesus, the model teacher, did not teach as the scribes, who tended merely to present various views on a subject, but rather he taught with authority ([Matt 7:29](#); [Mark 1:22](#); [Luke 4:32](#)). The teacher differs from a prophet, who speaks under the immediate impulse and influence of the Holy Spirit ([1 Cor 14:30](#)). The teacher gives instruction either on what is revealed by the prophet or written in Scripture. Also, the predictive function included in the prophet’s role is not a part of the purview of the teacher.

There has been a great deal of controversy about spiritual gifts for the modern church, particularly regarding the gift of prophecy. Although some think there is little distinction between prophecy and teaching, most maintain that a prophet imparts new revelation directly from the Lord ([1 Cor 14:30-31](#)), whereas a teacher illumines the hearer about past events and revelations. The prophet was prominent in the early church but became virtually unknown by the end of the second century. One can only speculate the reason for the demise of the prophet. Although some propose that it was due to the institutionalization of the church or the abuse of prophecy in Montanism, it is more likely that with the completion of the New Testament canon, the need for revelation ceased. Hence, the gift of prophecy does not seem to be operative today. By contrast, there are many modern examples of gifted men and women who are evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Some may question the validity of women pastors or pastor-teachers, but one must keep in mind that these are gifts and not offices. There should be no problem with women who pastor or shepherd other women ([Titus 2:3-4](#)), for example. It must be noted, however, that Priscilla, along with Aquila, taught Apollos the way of God more accurately ([Acts 18:25-26](#)), which indicates that women may not be limited to teaching only women. The gift of apostleship for today may function similarly to the early church in establishing churches in areas not reached by the gospel. Missionaries who are establishing churches may be fulfilling that role in the present time. Once again, one needs to remember that these are gifts and not offices. Christ has sovereignly given gifted people to the church. These gifts are not to be used for self-promotion but for building up believers. Paul now proceeds to elaborate on this.

Having demonstrated that Christ has given gifts to the church, Paul specifies that their immediate purpose is to build up the church ([4:12](#)), a process that will continue until the further purpose of the maturation of believers is accomplished ([4:13](#)), which is not only to protect them from instability but also to build them up in love ([4:14-16](#)). Concentrating on [4:12](#), the purpose of the giving of gifts is indicated by three prepositional phrases, each building on the previous phrase. The first prepositional phrase asserts that gifts were given in order to prepare or equip God’s people. The second prepositional phrase states that the goal of equipping believers is to prepare them for the work of the ministry. Hence, ministry is the responsibility of all believers and not just a few. This fact eliminates the distinction between clergy and laity, a distinction with little, if any, support in the New Testament. The third prepositional phrase indicates the final goal—namely, building up the body of Christ. The gifts are never for self-edification but for the edification of the whole body of believers. The concept that ministry belongs exclusively to clergy is foreign to this context because every believer is given a gift ([4:7](#)) and thus every believer must be involved in ministry.

Continuing, Paul states that the function of these gifts will continue until believers mature unto the measure of the fullness of Christ ([4:13](#)). As in [4:12](#), so also in the present verse, the three prepositional phrases indicate not three goals but three aspects of one goal—that is, attaining maturity. The first aspect is the unity of faith and the knowledge of God’s Son. The unity of faith corresponds to the “one faith” in [4:5](#), which was given as the evidence of unity among believers. The following prepositional phrases indicate that this is not organizational unity but the practical unity of the faith. This first aspect contains not only the achievement of unity of the faith but also the unity in the “knowledge of God’s Son,” without which unity of the faith would be impossible. This is not merely factual knowledge about God’s Son but intimate knowledge of him. Such knowledge applies not only to individuals but also to the body of believers, who together come to a unity of the knowledge of Christ.

***Material for Eph 4:14-16 appears next week.*

The Complete Biblical Library

Ephesians 4:7-13²

4:7. Suddenly Paul moved from discussing the Church as a whole to the individuals comprising the Church in order to show that unity is not uniformity. In His work of developing unity among God's people the Holy Spirit does not obliterate their individuality. In fact, He uses their differences. Christ gives "unto every one of us" a function or ministry in His body, and these functions are diverse. It is inconsistent to say, "I am a Christian, but I do not have a ministry." Christ gives to every Christian a ministry.

4:8. In [verse 8](#) Paul paraphrased [Psalm 68:18](#) to show the qualifications of Christ to grant these "gifts" or ministries to His disciples. This psalm gives a description of what probably was a return of King David after a military conquest. At the same time it is a messianic psalm of victory describing the completed work of Christ in accomplishing the plan of salvation.

4:9. Three major possibilities exist about the meaning of this verse. A few commentators think these statements refer to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 2](#)), but this interpretation is not very plausible. Others believe they are a reference to the incarnation and subsequent ascension of Christ after He accomplished what He came to earth to do. Still others believe Jesus actually descended into Hades to proclaim that His work of redemption was complete.

4:10. While there may be disagreement concerning what Paul meant, it is clear that he was explaining Christ's right to give specific ministries to the Church. Here Paul used a word often found in his writings which usually is translated "fullness" (*plērōma*) but here is a verb that translates "might fill." This same word was used often by the Gnostics to refer to angelic beings they considered as intermediary beings between God and human beings. The apostle made it clear, however, that Christ is all in all. He is the One who fills the whole universe because He is omnipresent; angels are not.

4:11. Paul lists here various types of ministries. The apostolic ministry is carried on by leaders who take the gospel where it has not gone before. Sometimes missionaries have this type of ministry. The prophetic ministry is to forthtell (for the present) and sometimes foretell God's will and plans. Evangelists are individuals who constantly present the message of salvation through redemption accomplished at Calvary. Because the Greek text shows only one definite article (*tous*) before "pastors... teachers," the two words may be referring to the same office. However, because the definite article here is plural, Paul may have been writing of two different offices. The pastor is the individual leader who shepherds God's people, while the teacher systematizes and teaches sound doctrine to believers. Yet the pastor might easily have a teaching function, as he surely needs in our present time. This list is not in order of importance, but in order of necessity. Each ministry is important for the proper functioning of the Church.

4:12. The remainder of the passage through [verse 16](#) describes clearly the two basic reasons why God places some people into full-time ministry. Christ has given every Christian a ministry, but not every Christian is a full-time minister in the sense of it being an occupation. First, these occupational ministers exist "for the perfecting of the saints" or to equip the saints so they in turn can minister for Christ. Some scholars believe the comma after the word "saints" does not belong there and stress that every believer has a ministry to fulfill. The word used here comes from *katartismos* and normally refers to furnishing something. The body of Christ will be built up as all Christians are involved in ministry.

2. Thoralf Gilbrant, ed., *The Complete Biblical Library – Galatians-Philemon*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 135-137.

4:13. Secondly, God has called full-time, occupational ministers to help believers mature in the Lord, or to become more and more like Christ himself. As believers mature they will advance from the infancy state into full-grown adults. Some theologians enjoy emphasizing the similarities between natural birth and spiritual birth and natural growth and spiritual growth. They fail sometimes, however, to describe the differences between them. For example, in natural birth a person has no choice as to which family he will be part of in life. In spiritual birth an individual does make a choice to become part of the family of God. In natural life growth is nearly automatic, unless something is wrong organically with the child. However, spiritual growth is never automatic.