

Ephesians 4:7-13 (NIV)

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it^[a] says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”^[b]

⁹ (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions^[c]?¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 4:8](#) Or *God*
- b. [Ephesians 4:8](#) Psalm 68:18
- c. [Ephesians 4:9](#) Or *the depths of the earth*

Ephesians 4:7-13 (HCSB)

⁷ Now grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of the Messiah’s gift. ⁸ For it says:

When He ascended on high,
He took prisoners into captivity;^[a]
He gave gifts to people.^[b]

⁹ But what does “He ascended” mean except that He^[c] descended to the lower parts of the earth?^[d]¹⁰ The One who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill^[e] all things. ¹¹ And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.

Footnotes:

- a. [Ephesians 4:8](#) Or *He led the captives*
- b. [Ephesians 4:8](#) [Ps 68:18](#)
- c. [Ephesians 4:9](#) Other mss add *first*
- d. [Ephesians 4:9](#) Or *the lower parts, namely, the earth*
- e. [Ephesians 4:10](#) Or *fulfill*; [Eph 1:23](#)

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹
Ephesians 4:7-13

4:7 Paul grounds variety within the Church's unity. God has granted a measure of **grace** to each believer as a gift from Christ.

4:8 This verse is an allusion to [Ps 68:18](#). The essence of the Psalm is that a military victor has the right to receive gifts from the people he has conquered and who now are his subjects. Paul suggested that Christ has conquered His enemies (unredeemed sinners) and has given gifts to them, with Paul himself being the perfect example. As Victor over sin and death, Christ gives gifts to His new devoted followers, His captives.

4:9-10 Paul emphasized that the resurrected and exalted Christ now imparts all the fullness of His blessings to the church and to the universe ([1:10,19-23](#); [3:20-21](#)).

4:11 The description here is more about gifted people (natural gifts that can be honed and used for the kingdom) than about spiritual gifts (contrast with Paul's meaning in [Rm 12](#); [1Co 12-14](#)). Five groups of gifted people are listed: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Apostles and prophets are foundational for the church's work ([Eph 3:5](#); see note at [2:20](#)). The term **apostles** primarily refers to people sent with a divine mission or task. They also served as spokesmen for God, bringing new revelation and understanding to the church. **Prophets** revealed God's will to believers for the present (forthtelling) and predicted the future (foretelling). All apostles were prophets, but not all prophets were apostles.

Evangelists were gifted to spread the gospel and plant churches. Evangelists proclaimed the good news in word and deed and instructed others in evangelism. **Pastors** and **teachers** shared similar responsibilities. Pastors provided oversight, comfort, and guidance as the church's shepherds ([Ac 20:28](#); [1Pe 5:1-4](#)). Teachers instructed and helped apply God's revelation to the life of the church. Teachers were concerned with passing on the church's revealed teachings ([1Co 15:3-4](#)) rather than bringing new inspirational insights like the prophets. Teachers are indispensable for building up the church and are necessary to enable believers to distinguish false doctrine from true teaching.

4:12 The purpose of the gifted people is to equip others to minister. Like many other long sentences in Ephesians, [verses 11-16](#) form one long sentence in the Greek text. The term translated **training** was sometimes used to refer to mending or restoring.

4:13 Ministry is intended to move believers toward accomplishing three goals: (1) unity of faith and full knowledge of God's Son, (2) maturity, and (3) the fullness of Christ. Maturity and unity are measured in terms of the relationship of the body to the Head, Christ.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 4".

English Standard Version - Study Bible²
Ephesians 4:7-13

4:7-10 The Different Gifts. Paul describes diverse gifts in the church. These come from the ascended Christ.

4:7 Grace... according to the measure of Christ's gift does not refer to different levels of *saving* grace but of grace given to serve Christ's church. To hold an office in Christ's church (see [3:2](#); [4:11-16](#)) requires a special calling from Christ himself, who rules his body as its head (see [1:22](#); [4:15](#); [5:23](#)).

4:8 it says. Paul cites [Ps. 68:18](#), where the one who ascends is the triumphant Lord God. Paul sees this as referring to Christ Jesus in his resurrection as head of the church. **gifts.** In [Ps. 68:18](#), the divine victor is seen "receiving gifts among men," but Paul adapts the passage to his purposes (as NT authors sometimes do in citing the OT) to show that Christ **gave** gifts to his people from his spoils of victory (interestingly, ancient Syriac and Aramaic translations of [Ps. 68:18](#) also have "gave"). The "gifts" given by Christ turn out to be the church leaders described in [Eph. 4:11](#). The **captives** over whom Christ triumphed are most likely demons (cf. this theme of victory over demonic forces in [1:19-22](#)).

4:9 lower regions, the earth. In the incarnation, Christ descended from the highest heavens to the lowest regions (i.e., to the earth), where he suffered, died, and was buried, but where he also defeated death and rose again. He then **ascended** ([Acts 1:9](#)) 40 days later to be seated in the highest heavens at the right hand of the Father ([Acts 2:33](#)).

4:10 far above. Christ is the supreme head of the church who fills **all things** (see [1:23](#)) with his glory, power, and sovereign prerogative to dispense gifts to his people (see [4:11-16](#)).

4:11-16 The Gifts for Edification of the Church. The list in [v. 11](#) is not complete since deacons are omitted. The focus here is gifted people who articulate the gospel.

4:11 Christ gives specific spiritual gifts to people in the church whose primary mission is to minister the Word of God ([v. 12](#)). For **apostles**, see note on [1:1](#). Regarding **prophets**, different views on the nature of the gift of prophecy in the NT affect one's understanding of this verse (see notes on [2:20](#); [1 Cor. 12:10](#)). Since the Greek construction here is different from [Eph. 2:20](#) and [3:5](#), some see this verse as a broader reference to the gift of prophecy generally in the NT church, rather than a reference to the "foundational" prophets mentioned in [2:20](#) and [3:5](#). From the Greek word for the "gospel" (*euangelion*), **evangelists** denotes people like Philip and Timothy who proclaimed the gospel ([Acts 21:8](#); [2 Tim. 4:5](#)). **shepherds** (or "pastors" [ESV footnote]). In the OT these are kings and judges ([2 Sam. 5:2](#); [7:7](#)). In the NT, elders "shepherd" by watching over and nurturing the church ([Acts 20:28](#); [1 Pet. 5:1-2](#)). There is some uncertainty as to whether "shepherds and **teachers**" refers here to two different ministry roles or functions, or whether the reference is to a single "shepherd-teacher" ministry role (cf. ESV footnote), since Paul uses a different Greek conjunction at the end of the list, joining the two nouns more closely together than the other nouns in the list. If "teachers" are a separate group, they can be understood as a special branch of shepherds (overseers, elders) responsible for instruction in God's Word (cf. [1 Tim. 5:17](#)).

4:12 Those church leaders with various gifts ([v. 11](#)) are to **equip the saints** (all Christians) so that they can do **the work of ministry**. All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used in ministering to one another ([1 Cor. 12:7](#), [11](#); [1 Pet. 4:10](#)).

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Ephesians 4".

4:13 The diversity of gifts serves to bring about the **unity** of Christ's people. **Mature manhood** extends the body metaphor used earlier for the church and contrasts with "children" in the next verse (see [Heb. 5:11-14](#)). Some people think that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is *people* who divide the church, whereas the **knowledge of the Son of God** (both knowing Christ personally and understanding all that he did and taught) is edifying and brings about "mature manhood" when set forth in love ([Phil. 3:10](#)). The work of the gifted ministers ([Eph. 4:11](#)) was to proclaim and teach the word centered on Christ rather than on speculative or eccentric teachings of their own (cf. [1 Cor. 2:2](#)). **measure**. Christ Jesus is the standard of the maturity to which the church must aspire. Christ's **fullness** is the full expression of his divine and human perfection (see [Eph. 1:23](#); [3:19](#); [Col. 1:19](#); [2:9](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

Ephesians 4:7-13

4:8 In [Psalm 68:18](#), God is pictured as a conqueror marching to the gates and taking tribute from the fallen city. Paul uses that picture to teach that Christ, in his crucifixion and resurrection, was victorious over Satan. When Christ ascended to heaven, he gave gifts to the church, some of which Paul discusses in [4:11-13](#).

4:9 The "lowly world" may be (1) the earth itself (lowly by comparison to heaven), (2) the grave, or (3) Hades (many believe Hades is the resting place of souls between death and resurrection). However we understand it, Christ is Lord of the whole universe, past, present, and future. Nothing or no one is hidden from him. The Lord of all came to earth and faced death to rescue all people. No one is beyond his reach.

4:11, 12 Our oneness in Christ does not destroy our individuality. The Holy Spirit has given each Christian special gifts for building up the church. Now that we have these gifts, it is crucial to use them. Are you spiritually mature, exercising the gifts God has given you? If you know what your gifts are, look for opportunities to serve. If you don't know, ask God to show you, perhaps with the help of your minister or Christian friends. Then, as you begin to recognize your special area of service, use your gifts to strengthen and encourage the church.

4:12, 13 God has given his church an enormous responsibility—to make disciples in every nation ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. If we had to fulfill this command as individuals, we might as well give up without trying—it would be impossible. But God calls us as members of his body. Some of us can do one task; some can do another. Together we can obey God more fully than any of us could alone. It is a human tendency to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and to underestimate what we can do as a group. But as the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we would dream possible working by ourselves. Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ (see the note on [3:19](#)).

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live By Ephesians #9: Building Up One Another

from Ephesians 4:7-16

**To become mature in Christ as local communities of faith,
we must all function as members of one another.**

After the resurrection, the disciples went back to Galilee, where Jesus told them,

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” (Mt 28:19-20a)

A short time later, Jesus ascended back to heaven, promising that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8; see also Eph 4:7-10).

When Jesus “ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things” (v. 10), these 11 men and a number of other members of Christ’s body were gifted and empowered to carry out the Great Commission (Ac 2:43; 6:7-8; 8:4-8). Thus, Jesus “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11), not only to launch local churches, but to train all believers (the “saints”) to do “the work of ministry” (v. 12). Then and only then will local communities of faith become mature and reflect Christ’s character.

Whatever our interpretation of this section of Ephesians, we must not miss Paul’s focus. These gifts were given to launch the church so that all believers can use their gifts and abilities in local communities of faith to build up the body of Jesus Christ (v. 16). We are indeed “members of one another” (v. 25). God designed the body of Christ to grow “in love” when every “individual part” functions properly (v. 16). (See Rm #22: A Servant’s Heart, p. 1552; 1Co #26: The Way of Love, p. 1585.)

Reflection and Response

How does God’s plan for building the tabernacles in the wilderness compare with God’s plan for building up the body of Christ? (See Ex #38: Gifts of the Holy Spirit, p. 123.)

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1630.