

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 30, 2025 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

T H E B O O K O F EPHESIANS *How to live the Christian life*

EPHESIANS: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – PART 25
“Christ’s Purpose for His Church” - Ephesians 4:7-10

“⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’ ⁹ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things).” – Ephesians 4:7-10 (NKJV)

KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EPHESIANS

To gain a better understanding of the Book of Ephesians, consider the following background information:

1. **Authorship:** The Apostle Paul - Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul.
2. **Date of Writing:** A.D. 60-63 - Likely written around A.D. 60-63 during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
3. **Place of writing:** Rome – Paul wrote the book/letter of Ephesians from a Roman prison
4. **Audience:** Ephesian Christians at Ephesus and surrounding area Addressed to the Christian community in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor. Ephesians is considered a “circular letter” meant to be circulated to church in the area of Ephesus... possibly the same 7 churches
5. **Purpose:** How to live the Christian life To strengthen the faith of believers and address issues of unity and spiritual maturity.
6. **Themes:** Grace, the church, and holy living - Key themes include grace, the church as the body of Christ, and the importance of living a holy life.

7. **Structure: Ephesus is divided into two main sections** - Divided into two main sections: doctrinal teachings (chapters 1-3) and practical applications (chapters 4-6).
 8. **Cultural Context: Ephesus was center of commerce and religion** - Ephesus was a center of commerce and religion, known for the Temple of Artemis.
 9. **Significance: Mystery of the gospel and inclusion of Gentiles** - Emphasizes the mystery of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan.
 10. **Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians' emphasis on the spiritual battle** Concludes with a call to spiritual readiness and the armor of God (chapter 6).
-

Application Questions

1. **How can a believer discover what his spiritual gifts are? Do we have only one, or more than one? Cite Scripture.**
2. **What are the dangers in the common notion that there is a distinction between clergy and laity? Are there any valid aspects of this distinction?**
3. **Why must a believer's purpose in life be tied in to the local church? Are we as American believers too individualistic?**
4. **How would our church be different if every member viewed himself or herself as a servant with a ministry to fulfill?**

You may be familiar with a book written several years ago called "*The Purpose Driven Life*" [Rick Warren] It quickly became one of the best selling books of all time. I am neither critiquing nor endorsing that book here, but I am raising the question, why has it been so popular? I read an article on the brilliant marketing strategy behind the book's success. But beyond the marketing strategy, it seems that the theme of the book taps into a deeply ingrained human need... **we want a meaningful purpose to govern our lives.**

- What is the point of getting through school? You say, "To get a good job!"
- What is the point of getting a good job? "To make enough money to support a family and do the things we want to do."
- So, assume that your marriage stays together and you raise a family. The kids grow up and leave the nest. You retire from your job, enjoy your grandkids, play some golf, catch some fish, drive around the country in your motor home and take videos of all the national parks, get sick and die. What did your life count for? What is the purpose of life?

Every Christian knows that we are here to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But, how do we do that?

- We glorify God and enjoy Him by living each day in submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ and by using the spiritual gifts that He has given to us to extend His kingdom.
- The context for exercising these gifts is in the local church, where each member works for the growth of the body, to build itself in love.

- Paul will write down below in Ephesians 4:16, *“¹⁶ (God) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

Paul has just emphasized the importance of the unity of the spiritual body of Christ. As we saw last time, this is an organic, spiritual unity, founded on seven essential unifying factors, related to the three members of the Trinity (Ephesians 4:4-6).

But, unity does not imply uniformity. Paul goes on to show (4:7-16) how the various members of the body have different gifts. As we exercise these gifts under the headship of Jesus Christ, the one body grows in maturity and strength.

While there is much that is plainly known about the subject of spiritual gifts there are also a number of common misconceptions that people hold about this subject, It is thus important that these misconceptions be cleared up. They include the following...

5 Common Misconceptions about Spiritual Gifts:

- (1) **Spiritual Gifts Are Not the Same as the Gift of the Holy Spirit** - Spiritual gifts, or the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are not the same as the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are many gifts of the Spirit, but there is only one Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit is received the moment a person trusts Jesus Christ as Savior. Simon Peter stated this to the multitudes which had gathered on the Day of Pentecost. The Bible says. Peter replied in Acts 2:38 (NLT), *“Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”*. Because a person has received the gift of the Holy Spirit at salvation, he or she can then begin to exercise the various gift or gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to them.
- (2) **Spiritual Gifts Are Not Merely Human Talents** - Spiritual gifts are abilities God gives the believer for the purpose of service. They are not merely human talents. Human talents are inadequate to do the work of God. Paul wrote about the difference between the work of the flesh, our old sinful nature, and the Spirit in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4 (NKJV), *“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds.”* Spiritual gifts are either supernatural abilities that God has bestowed on individuals, or God-given natural abilities that function through the direction of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts such as miracles, tongues, healing, and prophecy are supernatural in origin. Other spiritual gifts, such as teaching, administration, and helps, are God-given abilities to perform a particular role in God’s program. Though nonbelievers may have the same abilities, they do not function under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit takes these God-given abilities and uses them for His purposes in the lives of believers. Therefore, the gifts of the Spirit are abilities, either natural or supernatural, given by God

for the work of the ministry. While spiritual gifts can be either natural or supernatural abilities, the Scripture makes no distinction between the two.

- (3) **Spiritual Gifts Are Not Different Areas of Ministry** - Some people equate spiritual gifts with certain areas of ministry. They may say that someone, “has a real gift to reach older people,” or that another person, “has a special gift working with those who live in the inner city.” While this may be true of these people, this is not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of spiritual gifts. The Bible does not specify that spiritual gifts are abilities to work with certain age groups, or in certain geographical areas.
- (4) **Spiritual Gifts Are Not the Fruit of the Spirit** - The gifts of the Spirit are not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit have to do with service while the fruit of the Spirit has to do with character. Scripture speaks of nine graces called spiritual fruit. Paul wrote the following to the Galatians in Galatians 5:22-23 (HCSB), “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.*” The translation, God’s Word, puts it this way. “*But the spiritual nature produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There are no laws against things like that.*” Spiritual gifts are the means; spiritual fruit is the end. They are the qualities of Christian character that believers are to produce. Gifts are what the believer possesses, but the fruit of the Spirit is what the believer becomes. Spiritual gifts have to do with the functioning of the Christian ministry while spiritual fruit is how believers should behave. Spiritual gifts will someday cease, while spiritual fruits are permanent. It is important that we realize this distinction.
- (5) **Spiritual Gifts Are Not Offices** - Spiritual gifts are functions or ministries – they are not offices. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not the same as the various offices mentioned in the New Testament such as the office of apostle, prophet, pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon. These are leadership positions. Those who occupy such offices should possess the spiritual gift that goes with it. Yet a person can have the gift—of prophecy or teaching, for example—without occupying the office of a prophet or teacher. Therefore, an office is distinct from a spiritual gift.

There are two extremes to avoid concerning the subject of spiritual gifts and human involvement. Some make the mistake of assuming there is no human involvement in spiritual gifts while others assume the gifts are basically human abilities.

2 Extremes to Avoid with Respect to Human Involvement in Spiritual Gifts:

- (1) **The first extreme is to assume that human personality has nothing to do with the exercise of the gift** - This perspective tends to spiritualize spiritual gifts to the place where humans have no involvement whatsoever when the gift is being used. However, God does not obliterate our personalities when we exercise spiritual gifts. Neither are we mere passive vessels for Him to work with.
- (2) **The second extreme is to confuse spiritual gifts with mere human abilities** - Each and every particular ability that a Christian possesses is assumed to be a spiritual gift.

This perspective almost rules out the need for any supernatural involvement. It treats spiritual gifts as mere human abilities used for the kingdom of God. However spiritual gifts have their source in the supernatural work of God through the Person of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual gifts, at times, work independently of natural abilities, and at other times the spiritual gift uses the natural abilities that God has given us. The church is not strong because it is made up of superior men and women. Indeed, it is because the Holy Spirit has given special ability to its members to perform God's work.

In sum, misconceptions abound concerning spiritual gifts. This is why it is essential that we know exactly what the Bible says, and does not say, about this crucial subject.

In our text (in Ephesians 4:7-10), Paul is saying that...

KEY CONCEPT: The ascended, victorious Christ has given spiritual gifts to His church to extend His sovereign rule over all.

These are not the easiest verses in Ephesians to understand, so stay alert! There are some difficult interpretive matters where I cannot be dogmatic, because godly scholars disagree. But, the overall theme is fairly clear...

The Overall Theme of Ephesians 4:7-10:

- (1) Paul is showing that Jesus is the ascended, victorious Lord over all**
- (2) Paul is showing that God has sovereignly given various spiritual gifts to His church**
- (3) Paul is showing that God has done this (given various spiritual gifts to His church) so that "He might fill all things" (Eph. 4:10) - As I will explain, that means, "so that He might extend His sovereign rule over all."**

THE ASCENDED, VICTORIOUS CHRIST HAS GIVEN SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO HIS CHURCH (Ephesians 4:7)

"⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." - Ephesians 4:7

The words, "***But to each one,***" signal the shift from the one body to the individual members of that body. "***Grace***" is not Paul's usual word for spiritual gifts. But he used the word in this way in Ephesians 3:2, 7, & 8, where it refers to God's grace that called Paul into his ministry toward the Gentiles. It focuses on God's undeserved favor that took Paul from being a persecutor of the church to an apostle and preacher of the gospel. But, here he says that this same grace extends to "***each one of us.***"

Note two things:

2 Things of Note Here Concerning God's Grace and God's Gifts:

- (1) **Make sure that you have received God's grace in salvation** - "Each one of us" refers to those to whom Paul wrote Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." If you have not been rescued from God's judgment (that's what *saved* means) by God's undeserved favor (*grace*) through faith in Christ's death as your substitute, then nothing else that I am going to say in this message applies to you. You must receive God's gracious gift of eternal life before you receive His gracious spiritual gift that enables you to serve Him. If you think that you can earn salvation by serving God, you do not understand the gospel.
- (2) **If you have received His grace, the ascended Christ has given you a gift to use in serving Him** - Paul includes himself with all of those to whom he wrote, "to each of us." He didn't want anyone to think, "Of course, Paul has many gifts, but who am I in comparison with him? I don't have any spiritual gifts to speak of."

Note four things:

4 Important Things to Note About These Grace Gifts:

- (1) **Every believer has been given a gift** - Four chapters in the New Testament talk about spiritual gifts. The significant thing is that each chapter emphasizes that *every* believer has at least one spiritual gift.

4 Spiritual Gifts Passages in the Bible (New Testament):

1. **Romans 12:3-8** – Paul writes in Romans 12:3-8, "³ For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; ⁷ or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; ⁸ he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

Romans 12:3 says, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you 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." He goes on to talk about some of the various spiritual gifts. In verse 6, he says, "we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us...." So he is saying much the same thing as in Ephesians 4:7, that we all have received a gift; whatever we have is due to God's grace; and, that His grace varies according to His sovereign purpose.

2. 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-31 - *“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: ²You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led. ³Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: ⁸for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills...²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. ²⁸And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.”* In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 & 28-30, Paul gives two lists of spiritual gifts. As in Ephesians 4:4-6, he follows a trinitarian outline. After listing some of the gifts, he emphasizes again (12:11), “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” So twice he states that *each one* has a gift.

3. Ephesians 4:11-16 - *“¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”*

4. 1 Peter 4:7-11 - *“⁷But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. ⁸And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” ⁹Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* Besides Ephesians 4, the other text is 1 Peter 4:10-11, which groups all of the gifts under the general headings of serving gifts and speaking gifts: “As

each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Note, again, *each one*. So if you have received God’s gracious gift of salvation, you have also received His gracious spiritual gift to use for His glory.

(2) Christ distributes these gifts according to His sovereign purpose - Paul emphasizes this each time he speaks about spiritual gifts.

1. *In Romans 12:3, 6, he mentioned that God has allotted to each a measure of faith and that these gifts differ according to the grace that God has given to us.*
2. *In 1 Corinthians 12:11, he attributes the distribution of the various gifts to the sovereignty of the Spirit.*
3. *Here (Eph. 4:7), it is, “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”*

John MacArthur explains (*The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Ephesians* [Moody Press], p. 135), “The measure or specific portion given is by sovereign design from the Head of the church. The Lord has measured out the exact proportion of each believer’s gift...” I confess that I am sometimes jealous of those who can sing and play musical instruments, but God didn’t give me those gifts. I am also jealous of those who are gifted in evangelism, but that isn’t my gift. We have to bow before His sovereignty and accept how He has gifted us.

(3) Since Christ gave these gifts, we must use them as He directs - He is the sovereign Lord who distributes gifts according to His purpose. Thus we are accountable to Him to use the gifts that He has given as He directs. Contrary to popular opinion, there is no distinction in the New Testament between so-called “clergy” and “laity.” It is true that some may be supported so that they can work full time in various ministries (1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Some are given leadership gifts to equip the rest of the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). But every Christian is “in the ministry” in the sense that every Christian has a spiritual gift and will give an account to God for how he used it.

(READ: Matthew 25:14-30)

In the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30), Jesus pictured a man about to go on a journey who entrusted five talents to one slave, two to another, and one to yet another. A talent was a measure of money, not an ability to do something special. The man with the five talents went and traded with them and gained five more. The man with the two talents did the same and gained two more. But the man with only one talent hid the money until the master returned and gave him back his one talent. The master accused that servant of

being a wicked, lazy slave and ordered that he be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. That's a frightening parable, in that the lazy servant goes to hell! (I didn't make it up; Jesus did.) Two brief observations:

2 Observations from the Parable of the Talents:

1. **The danger is for the person who isn't given much to bury his talent** - If you think, "I can't do much for the Lord, so I won't do anything," take heed!
2. **Not to serve the Lord in any capacity is an indication that you are not truly saved** - If the one talent guy had used the talent to gain another one, he would have shown that he was a true servant of his master. He would have faithfully used what the master gave him. But by not using it at all and spending his time on his own selfish pursuits, he showed that he was not a true servant. So each of us needs carefully to consider, what gifts has the Lord entrusted to me and how does He want me to use them for His kingdom purposes?

(4) Using your gifts to serve Christ is an undeserved privilege - Paul emphasizes this by repeating the terms, "**grace,**" "**given,**" and "**gift**" (Ephesians 4:7). Because our spiritual gifts were given to us by grace, there is no place for boasting. As Paul asks rhetorically in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "**What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?**" Also, there is no place for grumbling when you serve the Lord. The very fact that you, a former rebel, are serving the Lord Jesus Christ, is pure grace! Think of where you could be, without hope and without God in this world (Eph. 2:12), living for vain pleasures and headed toward eternal punishment. When you're tempted to quit serving the Lord because someone hurt your feelings or didn't appreciate you as much as he should have, stop and think about the undeserved privilege of serving Him!

But, serving Christ, especially if we should be persecuted as Paul was, only makes sense if Christ is who He claimed to be. So Paul goes on to show that...

CHRIST'S HUMILIATION AND VICTORIOUS ASCENSION QUALIFY HIM TO GIVE THESE SPIRITUAL GIFTS TO HIS CHURCH (Ephesians 4:8-10)

"⁸ Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.' ⁹ (Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things)." – Ephesians 4:8-10 (NKJV)

This is where things get difficult, so stay with me! Paul makes three points, one in each verse (8, 9, & 10):

Paul's 3 Points in Ephesians 4:8-10:

(1) **Psalm 68:18 pictures Christ's victorious ascension (Ephesians 4:8)** – “⁸ *Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.'*” “Here Paul cites Psalm 68:18, “*When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.*” As I will comment on in a moment, Paul changes one key word, “*received,*” to “*gave.*” It is a psalm of David and is difficult to follow in places. But one scholar sums it up (Richard A. Taylor, “The Use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8 in Light of the Ancient Versions, *Bibliotheca Sacra* [July-September, 1991], p. 322), “The overarching message of the psalm is that God is to be praised as the One whose past acts of deliverance and provision for His people give confidence of His continuing care for His people. The message of verse 18 in particular is that in the person of the victorious king (or possibly in the location of the ark of the covenant) God ascended Zion in triumph over His enemies, receiving from submissive peoples congratulatory gifts of honor.” So Paul takes this verse about a victorious Israelite king leading his captives in triumphal procession, receiving gifts of booty and applies it to the victorious, ascended Christ in relation to His church. (READ: Psalm 68:1-10ff)

Several Things to Note:

1. **Psalm 68:18 in its context obviously refers to the Lord ascending and Paul applies it directly to Christ** - This is seen very clearly if you read through the entire psalm, but to be brief, note just verses 17 & 18, “*The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell there.*” The poetic picture is that the Lord's people were in trouble and the Lord came down and delivered them. Then He ascended again into heaven as the victorious warrior. Paul applies this directly to Christ.
2. **The verse pictures Christ ascending into heaven after securing victory over His enemies** - This includes Satan and his evil hosts, as Christ defeated them at the cross (Col. 2:15). But it may also allude to all of us who were formerly his enemies, but who were brought into willing submission at the cross. We are now His willing captives, ready to obey the One that we formerly hated.
3. **After His ascension, Jesus gave gifts to His church** - The picture is of a victorious warrior, receiving spoil after his victory and then distributing that spoil as gifts to his people. (Peter expresses a similar idea of the ascended Christ's receiving and giving in Acts 2:33.) The difficult issue to decide is, why did Paul change “*received*” from Psalm 68:18 into “*gave*” in our text? The bottom line (after reading many different proposed solutions) is that no one knows for sure! Calvin (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], on Eph. 4:8, p. 273) points out that Paul sometimes does not quote the exact words of the Old Testament, but rather conveys the substance of it in his own language (see, also, Frank Thielman, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* [Baker], ed. by G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson, p. 823). So here, Paul may be

drawing an analogy from the psalm that did not contradict the sense of the original context. When a victorious king received booty, he would distribute that booty among his loyal subjects. But, Calvin is inclined to a different opinion, that Paul purposely changed the word to adapt the psalm to his own purpose in Ephesians. He suggests that Paul is drawing a comparison between the greater and the less. The lesser is seen in an earthly king who gathers spoils from the vanquished. But Christ's victory and ascension is greater in that He graciously gives His bounty to His people. However you explain Paul's change of words, his overall point is that Psalm 68:18, which clearly refers to the Lord God, pictures Christ's victorious ascension.

(2) Christ's victorious ascension assumes that He first descended into the lower parts of the earth (Ephesians 4:9) – *“⁹ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?”* In **verse 9**, Paul is reasoning that if Christ ascended, He first had to descend. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus in **John 3:13**, *“No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”* Jesus claimed to have come down from heaven to this earth, sent by the Father (see John 6:33, 38, 51, 58). So when He ascended into heaven, Jesus was returning to the place where He dwelled before the foundation of the world (John 6:62). But, what does Paul mean when he says, *“the lower parts of the earth”*? There are three options.

3 Options to the phrase “the lower parts of the earth”:

- 1. Some say that it simply means, “the earth as contrasted with heaven.”** - The NIV translates it this way.
- 2. Some take it to refer to Jesus’ descent into Hades during the time between His death and resurrection** - Based on one interpretation of 1 Pet. 3:18-20
- 3. It could refer to the grave** -

So the idea here is parallel to Philippians 2:5-11, where Paul states that Jesus laid aside the glory that He had in heaven and took on the form of a bond-servant. He became obedient even to death on a cross. Therefore (Phil. 2:9), *“God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.”* So Ephesians 4:9 shows us that the risen, ascended Jesus is qualified to bestow spiritual gifts on His church because He came to this earth willingly to go to the cross.

(3) Christ's victorious ascension places Him above all powers, so that He may reign through His church (Ephesians 4:10) – *“¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things).” – Ephesians 4:10 (NKJV)* The idea of this verse is similar to Philippians 2:9-11, but in the context of Ephesians, it takes us back to 1:20-21, where Paul states that after God raised Jesus from the dead, He was seated in heaven, far above all rule and authority. He then adds (1:22-23), *“And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all*

things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Jesus’ filling all in all, or all things, refers to His sovereign rule over all. The connection with the church shows that Jesus exercises His sovereign rule and displays His spiritual presence through the church. As we live in submission to Jesus’ lordship, the world gets a glimpse of that future day when He will reign supreme. The world should see in the church a display of that yet future kingdom, when He will rule over all as King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:15-16). As we exercise the spiritual gifts that the ascended, victorious Savior has given to us, we help to extend His sovereign rule over all before He comes to reign supremely.

CONCLUSION

Four applications stem from these difficult, but important verses:

4 Application from Ephesians 4:7-10:

- (1) **To extend Christ’s sovereign rule over all, I must begin with me** - Am I living daily under His sovereign rule? Am I obedient to Christ, beginning on the thought level? Am I seeking to know Him and His will through His Word so that I can obey Him?
- (2) **To extend Christ’s sovereign rule over all, I must be committed to the local church, where I must discover and exercise the gifts that He has given to me** - It is through the church, locally expressed, that Christ fills all in all (Eph. 1:23). If all you do is attend a weekly church service, but you’re not involved in using your gifts to serve, you are not fulfilling Christ’s purpose for your life.
- (3) **To extend Christ’s sovereign rule over all, I must engage in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness** - These verses are steeped in warfare terminology (which will be further developed in 6:10-20). When you use your gifts to serve Christ, you are engaging the spiritual forces of wickedness in battle. Satan does not want to see Christ’s kingdom extended through an obedient church. So don’t be naïve. Serving Christ is not a Sunday School picnic! It is warfare and you need to be armed and ready for combat. Often the wounds come from friendly fire, not directly from the enemy!
- (4) **To extend Christ’s sovereign rule over all is to engage in a battle that will ultimately succeed** - You will grow weary in the battle. You will often feel as if your efforts are not accomplishing anything of lasting value. You will often feel like quitting. When you get wounded, you will be tempted to drop out of any kind of service. At such times, remember Paul’s climatic words at the end of his great chapter on the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:58), *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”*

Christ’s victorious ascension means that His church will triumph with Him. We will display and share in His glory. But for now, we must engage in the battle by using the gracious spiritual gifts that He has given to us. That is our God-given purpose!