

Ephesians 4:7–16

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 00] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, when he ascended on high, he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.

In saying he ascended, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Thanks, Jeremy. Thanks, Jeremy.

[1 : 54] Father, speak as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us, and shape and fashion us into your likeness.

We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. We are in Sermon 11 of our Ephesians series, one that will take us 20 weeks to accomplish.

We have seen masterful and marvelous texts along the way. It's a book worth reading and rereading throughout your lifetime, our lifetimes. We have marveled in the fact that God has given us every spiritual blessing.

He has withheld nothing from us. We have witnessed the dead being raised and the divided being reconciled. We have been introduced to the ecclesia, the church, the assembly of Christians, a people set apart as Christ's inheritance, his treasure, his beautiful bride.

And this collective people, the church, are to be a distinct people, a distinguished people, differentiated from the general populace, certainly by their ethic, as we'll see in following weeks.

[3 : 27] But the question we come to this morning is, what distinguishes us from outsiders? What is to be special about this body of people?

What is the church supposed to be on about? What is our aim as a people? Our attention this morning is directed to the 10 verses that Jeremy read for us.

The first six verses of this chapter were aptly summarized by the charge last week to guard the unity. Guard the unity. Uphold it. Preserve it.

Contend for it. Stand up for it. Preserve it. And in the language of the ESV, you see it there. Maintain it. Maintain it.

Maintain what has been done for the Christian. One body. One spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One God.

[4 : 29] Unless there be any confusion, we are to be assured of the singular work that forges and fashions our unity. Last week, you can underline it there in verse 3.

We are to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Guard what has been done. Blood bought. And bled for. This week, we will find that we are not only to maintain the unity, but according to verse 13, we are to attain the unity.

Attain the unity of the faith. You connect the dots. Verse 3 connects to verse 13. We are to guard what has been accomplished. And all the while, we are to go after what we have yet to obtain.

Guard it and go after it. See, unity is at the heart of the chapter. It's the foremost threat to any congregation. It is that which will mar our witness.

It is that which will inflict pain and wound those within. For those of you familiar with the Bible, you will know that Jesus' final prayer, he prays for a lot of things.

[5 : 40] But you might recall, he prayed that we may be one. The plea of a soon-to-be-dying man was that his people would be one.

At the heart of God's desire for his people is for you and I to share, to have a shared life. Not only with God, but with one another.

We are to experience unity. A harmonious existence that results in our joy and flourishing. And in one sense, we are already united in Christ.

Meanwhile, we are working out that unity with one another. The process becomes one that is continuous. You'll see the images in the passage. A growing body.

A building undergoing construction. That's us. Under construction. Growing. Maturing. We're like Chicago road construction.

[6 : 41] Never stopping. Unending. Perpetual. Unity is ours. Yet unity is Christ's church's ongoing building project.

We are constructing to this end. We are building toward this goal. This morning, I've titled my talk, this sermon, grace to grow.

Grace to grow. And I hope you'll be able to track my logic in the next 30 minutes. Our verses begin right there in verses 7. But grace was given.

And it concludes with the goal in verse 16. It makes the body grow. Grace to grow. And I'll take three headings this morning.

I couldn't alliterate. It was too hard. But here they are. Three headings this morning. Diversity. Responsibility.

[7 : 38] And maturity. Diversity. Responsibility. And maturity. Diversity. The people of God are to be a united people.

But we are certainly not uniform in any sense. We are a collection of individuals who have our individuality. We are one body made up of many bodies. Anyone who grew up amongst multiple siblings has experienced something along these lines.

You're raised by the same parents. You're socialized in remarkably similar ways. You're brought up with the same values. Yet you and your siblings are very different.

You resemble one another. But you're clearly distinct. We belong to a family. But we're undoubtedly individuals.

And while the gospel calls us into a new family. It retains this individuality by design. This passage as I mentioned has a focus on unity togetherness.

[8 : 40] But it will not allow us to disregard our one. Each oneness. Let me point this out to you. You see it in verse 7. It transitions to the individual.

But grace was given to each one. Each individual. And in verse 16 it concludes with the same phrase. We are each one. Or as the ESV has translated.

Every part. In other words we are individuals that make up the whole. We are a building comprised of multiple blocks. We are a body consisting of numerous parts.

We though many are one. We though one are many. Amen. The church was designed to be this very way by God himself. And allow me to show you beginning in verse 7.

We are according to verse 7. Diversely gifted. Diversity is a gift by divine intention.

[9 : 42] Verses 7 to 9 show us this very reality. My children wanted me to title this sermon. Jesus gave you a gift. And here it is. Verses 7 to 9.

The image is one of a conquering king. The quotation comes from the 68th Psalm. And though with a significant variation. Originally the Psalm depicts a general.

Or a mighty warrior. Returning from battle. And behind his army is a train of captives. You can imagine as a victorious army returns home.

As they pass through regions on their way home. What they will be met with. Are people or neighboring towns lauding them. Or showering them with gifts.

And the mighty victor would receive these gifts as tributes. Because you know local towns are probably buying their favor. And here Paul harkens back to Psalm 68.

[10:40] And he makes a big adjustment. He summons Psalm 68. And Psalm 68 declares actually when he ascended in high.

He led a host of captives. And he received gifts from men. But here Paul changes the quotation a little bit. And writes that now the king or the victor is giving out gifts to people.

As the king sits enthroned. And picture it. He starts distributing his wealth. His gifts. His property. The victorious king is certainly the Lord Jesus. That's the he in these verses. The parenthetical verses. And verses 9 and 10 don't mean they're not important.

They are actually important. They refer to Jesus. He's the one who ascended in his exaltation. Who according to 120 was raised and seated.

[11:44] Ascended and atthroned. And he is the one who descended in his incarnation. God in human flesh becoming man. God or Jesus descends as our redeemer.

And he ascends as the victor. In his descension and ascension. He is demonstrating that his rule actually extends from heaven to earth.

That he conquers earth. In his death, burial, resurrection. Defeats evil, Satan, hell and death. And returns to his throne. And all this, while he's doing it, he's hanging out in heaven.

And he decides to flex. And he says, I'm going to show off on earth as well. And he shows us the expanse of his territorial reign.

Heaven and earth. Hence, he fills all things. It's shorthand for saying he rules over all things. In the same way. In a similar way.

[12:47] Where tyrants and rulers and dictators. Try to encroach national borders. To take space. Jesus does so.

And he captures space. Emblematic that he owns it. That it belongs to him. He fills all things. He sits enthroned.

He in grace begins to give gifts. He in grace gives gifts. To individual people. He graciously dispenses gifts.

Or deposits gifts in his people. And you may be keen to think, well yes. Oh yeah, he's given me a gift. I know the gift.

It's mentioned already in Ephesians chapter 2. My salvation is a gift. We read that. By grace we have been saved through faith.

[13:47] It's not your own doing. It is a gift of God. But that's not the gift Paul is talking about here. Yes, your salvation is a gift. But here we are given a gift.

That enables our participation. Now catch this. God's grace is not merely for your salvation. It is also for your participation.

Grace is poured forth. For our salvation. And for our participation. If this is the case. You will intuitively ask the question.

Well, what did I get? What's mine? What's my present? What have I gotten? And Paul doesn't list them here. You could read 1 Corinthians 12. Romans 12.

1 Peter 4. And you could go find all the gifts. That he might have given you. And try to decipher what it may be. But the passage here doesn't tell us. What the gift you might have gotten is.

[14:48] Rather, the passage here wants to emphasize. You got something. You got something. That under.

No one was left out. Under Jesus' Christmas tree. You got something. You got something. Borrowing the language from Peter.

Each has received a gift. What we're about to discover. Is we didn't all get the same gift. We didn't all get matching pajamas.

We all didn't get brand new white socks. What we did is we received. What Christ determined. In accordance to his grace. This is our diversity.

This is the beauty of the church. This was God's intention. This was God's big grand idea. I'm going to lavish on them. All sorts of things. Gifts.

[15:45] Spiritual gifts. Capabilities. Capacities. Experiences. Backgrounds. Ethnicities. Passions. Cultures. Dispositions. I want to give it all to them.

And God in his wisdom takes whatever your Myers-Briggs. Are those letters? Yeah. Letters are. Or whatever your. I'm going to mispronounce it. Enneagram.

Whatever that is. And he just puts them all together in one room. Why? Because God will be glorified.

When he unites people that are diversified. One of our values at Christ Church Chicago. Is that we believe that the more diverse.

Our congregation becomes. Becomes. The richer. Our fellowship. Is. Let me throw that out one more time.

[16:40] We believe. That the more diverse. Our congregation becomes. The richer. Our fellowship. Is. And I'm not only speaking about ethnic. Diversity. I'm thinking.

Every. Form. Of diversity. Socioeconomic. Background. Experience. All of it. The more varied. And diverse. We are. Is actually. A demonstration. Of God's. Grace. To us. The more diverse. We are. Is a demonstration. Of God's grace. To us. Diversity. Secondly. Responsibility. These gifts are lavished. On individuals. But verse 11.

Indicates. There are gifts. To the church. As a whole. Whole. And he gave. And Jesus. Gave. The apostles. Prophets. Evangelists.

[17:36] Shepherds. And teachers. There is an ongoing debate. As to whether there are actually. Four or five gifts here. And our translations. Try to conserve. The interpretive challenge.

Because it puts the. The article. The. In front of. All of them. The question is. Whether shepherds. And teachers. Are one gift. And for our purposes. I'll avoid claiming.

One or the other. I'll simply. Direct our attention. To them. As a collective sum. But strikingly. These offices. These four or five. Are strongly. Tethered together.

By one. Fact. That they are all. Positions. That require. The transmission. And the preservation. Of God's spoken. And written. Word.

We've seen. The apostles. And prophets. Are foundational. According to chapter 2. Verse 20. They were those. Who. Who. Who. Who hung out. With Jesus. Or were very close. To Jesus.

[18:29] They spoke truthfully. On God's behalf. And at critical moments. In the life of the early church. The evangelists. Literally. Were translated. As gospelers.

They were tellers. Of good news. Those who furthered. The gospel. Shepherds and teachers. Were those. Who exercised oversight. Maybe over a particular. Congregation.

Or a geographic. Place. Protecting. And instructing. A local church. They were those. Who fortified. The message. The fact. Is that Jesus. Gifted the church.

With these gifts. Incidentally. Who are people. Regarding the word. And it demonstrates. The primacy. Of the word. Standing.

And reinforcing. What the psalmist. Said. That the Lord. Has actually. Exalted. Above all things. His name. And his word. In God's mind. It is of. Utmost importance.

[19:22] To preserve. Propagate. And protect. His word. Why? Because Jesus. Rules his people. Through his word. It's not strange. For me.

To make that assertion. Especially. For those of us. Who dwell in this country. This past week. You've heard it. On the news. Or read of it. As our.

Our Supreme Court. Tries to fill. That ninth. And final seat. It's a crucial. Appointment. Why? Because as. This nation. Desires to uphold. The word.

Of the law. The founding documents. The constitution. Of the United States. Of America. Why? Because the nation. Our nation. Is governed. By. The word.

Contained in those documents. And as our nation. Is governed. By the word of law. God's people. Are. Governed. By the word of truth. And he gives gifts.

[20:20] Apostles. And prophets. Back then. Evangelists. Shepherds. Teachers. And pastors. Now. Why? His word.

Must be preserved. Propagated. And protected. But here in Ephesians. What we find. More specifically. Maybe to your surprise. It was to my surprise. Why these gifts.

Or these people. Are given. These individuals. According to verse. Twelve. Are to equip. The saints. Equip.

Carries. The meaning of preparing. They are to equip. The saints. They are to prepare. God's. People. For two things. In particular. For. The work of the ministry.

And for. The building up. Of the body. Of Christ. The apostle. Prophet. Evangelist. Shepherd. Teacher. Are responsible.

[21:15] For. For. For. Equipping. The saints. For. Preparing. The people. To do. A twofold. Task. For the work. Of the ministry. And for building up. The body. The saints.

Are responsible. For. Undertaking. The work. Of the ministry. And strengthening. The people. Of God. The shepherds. And the saints. Both have. Duties. They both have. Responsibilities. In other words. If you count yourself. As part of the redeemed. People of God. If you see yourself. As a Christian. You have responsibilities. In the church. Wait. Wow. Bing. I thought that's. What we hired. You to do. The work. Of the ministry. Isn't that why we. Compensate. You. We have more work to do. Isn't that why we brought on. Another. Pastor. In one sense.

[22 : 11] Yes. The pastoral team. At Christ Church. Chicago. Expands. Because there's. Further work. That needs. To be done. But don't be mistaken. This is our. Shared.

Work. I will work. With all my might. To equip. You. To prepare. You. So that we can go. Do the work. Of the ministry. And build up. This body. Work. Requires. Some. Exertion. On our part. It requires. The output. Of energy. To build. Requires. Effort. And resources. And listen. Closely. Uh oh. You are. Gravely. Mistaken. If you. Think. This gathering. Is to feed. Your. General. Consumption. The church. Is not. Something. To be consumed. This is not. Some. Performance.

[23 : 05] To be watched. Or critiqued. There are those. Who for sad reasons. Attend. With consumer mentalities.

I'm here to consume the music. I'm here to consume the relationships. I'm here to consume all the resources. Until they're dry. And then I'll leave. And be forewarned. There are those who attend church. As if they're locusts. Consuming everything. And moving on. They're fattened sheep. Grazing among. The flock. But never joining. The fold. It cannot be us. It cannot be you. Because this passage. Dispels any consumerism. Rather this passage. Shouts. For your. Contra. Contribution. Not your consumption. Your contribution. No longer. Are we to be a people who. What can I get out of this?

[24 : 03] What's in it for me? Rather you walk through those doors. And as eight year old Grant. Held that door open for me this morning. The question I walked in with this morning.

How can I serve? What can I give? What can I do? How do I empty myself? And don't mishear me. I'm not saying. You shouldn't come here expecting to receive. Certainly God is generous. And he gives far more than we ever deserve. But I am warning you. If you come with this mindset. To this congregation. To solely receive. You are sadly misguided. And you are certainly mistaken. At times you will participate. In this congregation. On Sunday. And you'll receive. Very little. You'll leave here saying. I'm not sure why I went that morning. But I never want you to leave here. This morning. Feeling. I wish I gave more.

[25 : 10] I wish I encouraged more. I wish I helped more. I wish I committed more. I wish I had to do it. I wish I had to do it. We only become what we are intended to become.

When we bring all of our gifts. To serve. Build. Construct. Invest. Contribute. That we become what we were divinely purposed to do. We are interdependent on one another. And as I bring my gifts. I pray to God that you are served. And as you bring your gifts. I pray to God that I am served. At this very moment. This is being demonstrated. I hope you're benefiting from this. You may not be. But I am. Because Lisa Helms sits with four-year-old Josiah. Pouring into him. Do you know Jesus loves you? Jesus bought you. Jesus owns you. And he's called you. And poor, poor Vizcala. I think is sitting with everyone who barely walks.

[26 : 09] Crying. Screaming. Fighting. Why? I'm not. I don't know if he gets something out of that. But I know for the mom.

And for the dad. That while he labors in there. And while I labor up here. You may actually benefit. Benefit. Alright.

When you can't say it better. You quote John Calvin. No member of the body of Christ. Christ. Is endowed with such perfection.

As to be able without the assistance of others. To supply his own necessities. In short. We cannot do well. Without one another.

We are deformed and deficient as a congregation. If we fail to step into our responsibilities. I had an injury a couple years back. I won't tell you how I got it.

[27 : 06] Because it's embarrassing. And I haven't come up with a great story for it. Well I'll tell you how I got it. Because I got it taking off. Changing my pants.

But the diagnosis was something called mallet finger. And so my middle finger on my left hand. It was an injury to a tendon.

At the extremity of the finger. It was permanently bent. In this way. I went immediately to the orthopedic doctor. Knowing that there. Hey there's something not right with my finger.

And the first test was simple. Straighten your finger. And there I was. With all my might. With all my mental capabilities. With all my energy. Straighten.

Straighten. Straighten. And lo and behold it didn't straighten. I did what my brain always did. And nothing happened. My finger was still curved and bent.

[28 : 05] And here it is. My tendon. Present in my finger. Was there.

But doing nothing. But doing nothing. My hand was handicapped. And my challenge. Is that may you not.

Be present. And doing nothing. Don't be present. And doing nothing. And handicaps. All of us. Diversity.

Responsibility. Maturity. Maturity. The outcome of our responsibility. Will be maturity. We will be all grown up. We will be developed and established.

We will be as the university students say. Adulthood. Adulthood. Mature manhood. As our text calls it. It's juxtaposed.

[29 : 01] To being children. You see it there. In verse 14. We are to be. Mature. According to verse 13. So that we may. No longer be like.

Children. Tossed to and fro. By the waves. And carried about. By every wind. Of doctrine. We are not to be like. A rudderless boat. Lacking an anchor. Blown about.

With every new idea. Or intriguing philosophy. We are not to be easily. Duped. Or tricked. Or misled. In this way. We are not to be like. Children.

Meandering. Changing our minds. Intrigued by bright lights. Or distractions. In one moment. Playing here. And changing their minds. Saying. I want to play now with this. We are not to be.

Led away. By human cunning. Or craftiness. And deceitful. Schemes. These words. Cunning. And crafty. Certainly.

[30 : 02] Harken back. To a snake. In Genesis 3. Immaturity. Is demonstrated. By those. Who are misled. Not only by human cunning. But ultimately. By the schemes.

Of the devil. One who undermines. The instructions. And commands. Of God. Our maturity. Is displayed. In verse 15.

As those. Who speak. The truth. In love. Notice. That within this. Context. The phrase. Speak the truth. In love. Is used. To combat. Erroneous.

Doctrine. We speak. The truth. In love. To correct. What is mistaken. About God. This is closely. Tethered. To Christ's. Concern. Concern. For preserving. His word. In the church. We are to. To protect. The truth. Defend. The truth. The truth. The truth. Most adamantly.

[30 : 56] Regarding his word. Amongst us. We are to be those. Who speak up. When the truth. Of God. The gospel. Is undermined. Yet. Know how it's. To be done. In love.

In love. John. Stopped. Perceptively. Comments. Thank God. That there are those. In the contemporary. Church. Who are determined. At all costs. To defend. And uphold.

God's revealed truth. When they think. They smell heresy. Their nose. Begins to twitch. Their muscles. Tighten. And the light of battle. Enters their eye.

They seem to enjoy. Nothing more. Than a fight. But the truth. Of the gospel. Needs to be proclaimed. And upheld. Within the community. Of believers. It needs to be done.

With a heart. That is tender. A heart. Filled. With. Love. On occasion.

[31 : 54] When I'm with other pastors. I'll often ask. How their congregation. Is doing. If things are well. They will usually respond. With a couple. I'm doing well.

The congregation. Is growing. And it's usually. In reference. To. To. To numeric. Growth. Possibly. Even monetary. Growth. Oftentimes.

The metric. For church health. Is. Numeric. Sure. They're valid. Metrics. And they give you. Some form. Of an assessment. It. And sure.

We aspire. To be. A growing. Church. Both in. Attendance. And witness. However. More. I think. We want to be. More. Than a growing.

Church. We want to be. A grown. Church. A grown. Church. It's the language. You might hear. A commentator.

[32 : 50] Use. When they're. Commentating. Maybe. On some. Sporting. Event. With college. Collegiate. Athletes. They're usually. Physical. Specimens.

In size. Speed. Or. Shape. Or stature. And they would say. He's a grown boy. He's a grown boy. Meaning. He's developed. And as much as.

I desire us. To be growing. I think Paul. I want us. To be grown. Grown. So may this.

Be our aspiration. And in so doing. You'll find. What you'll find. That is. We become. A suitable body. For the Lord Jesus. Our head.

You may have noted. This Christ language. In the closing verses. A stature. Of the fullness. Of Christ. Growing up. In every way. Into Christ. A mature.

[33 : 52] Church. Ultimately. Is a congregation. That looks. A lot. Like Jesus. We resemble. His character. We share. His convictions. We have.

His attributes. You see. The church. The people. Of God. This is crazy. To think. Are the closest. The world.

Will ever. Get. To seeing. Jesus. Jesus. It's a horrifying. Thought. It's a horrifying. Thought. Yet. At the same time. It's a holy. Aspiration. Many of you. And with this. I close. Many of you. Would know. Jesus. Had a group.

Of twelve. Disciples. Those who. Accompanied him. On his earthly. Ministry. Some were skeptics. And doubters. And as he called. Them to himself. There was a. One of his early.

[34 : 47] Disciples. Was Philip. He was one of the twelve. And. And he had discovered. Jesus. And realized. Who Jesus was. That Jesus. Was the promised one. The holy one.

Of Israel. And Philip. Immediately goes. To find his friend. Nathaniel. And Philip. Says to Nathaniel. Nathaniel. We got him. We found him. And Nathaniel.

Says. Where did you find him? We found him. In Nazareth. Nazareth. Nothing good. Comes out of. Nazareth. Why?

Well. Jesus. He was implying. How could anything. Good or worthwhile. Come from Nazareth. And Philip. Simply responds. Come and take a look. Come and see. Come and see.

My hope. Is that for many. Christ's church. Will be that place. That you walk out.

[35 : 45] These doors. And they may be a colleague. Or a classmate. A friend. Or a neighbor. A new person.

Or a stranger. And you enter into this conversation. And somehow it gets to. Well I found him. I found Jesus. I found Jesus. Well what does he look like?

Where is he at? Oh I found him in Chicago. In Woodlawn. Actually. Woodlawn. In Chicago. That divided city.

That blood stained city. That broken city. Yeah. Come and see. Come and see. And they walk in these doors. And they go.

Hey. Look. Look. As they walk through our doors. Where they encounter.

[36 : 43] The Jesus of scriptures. They would behold. Our diversity. They would observe. A congregation. Faithfully. Working out our responsibilities.

And they would praise God. For our maturity. And they would attest. Somewhere down the road. Where did you see Jesus? I met him.

In Chicago. 62nd. And Woodlawn Avenue. To be precise. May it be so. May it be so.

Diversity. Responsibility. Maturity. Father. We come to you. We thank you. For grace.

To grow. And help us. To grow. And mature. To resemble. The Savior. That bled for us. Help us.

[37 : 41] To become. Christ like. In our witness. May we be. A congregation. That resembles. The beautiful. Lord Jesus.

Jesus. And. Would you. As we exalt you. Draw all men. To yourself. And save. To the glory.

Of your son. And to the exaltation. Of your name. We pray these things. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.