A Special Kind of Grace

A Study through the book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:7-10

For we Christians, expressing the heart, the truth and the touch of Jesus to everyone around us is one of our main callings in life. The good news is that Jesus gives each one of us a special kind of grace to enhance and fulfill this purpose. Let's talk about this today.

Welcome back to our journey through the book of Ephesians, as we have begun to navigate through the 4th chapter. The whole point of this fourth chapter in Ephesians is about living a life worthy of the calling we have received (see verse one).

Today, we pick up where we left off in Ephesians 4:7-10 that focuses on our living worthy of the calling we received by expressing the special kind of grace that Jesus is downloading in us. Let's unpack these amazing verses:

Ephesians 4:7, "But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it."

In the New Testament there are three primarily aspects of God's grace:

1. The first aspect of grace has to do with God's saving grace. This is best defined as God's unmerited favor toward us in Christ (Eph. 2:8) by which we have been saved.
2. The second aspect of grace has to do with God's enabling grace (1 Cor. 15:10) this is a special power by which we are enabled to live out God's will.
3. The third aspect of grace has to do with God's gifting grace. This is best defined as God's spiritual gifts working through us (1 Cor. 12:4) which enhances our assignments.

Whenever the word "grace" is used in a New Testament passage, we must look at its context to get the clues we need to determine what aspect of grace that the passage is referring to.

In the case of this verse, we find our clues in verses 8 and 11 where we read, "He gave gifts" and "Gave some to be apostles, prophets…" etc. Surmising that the grace referred to in verse 7 is this third aspect of grace, God's gifting grace to enhance our ministries.

Let's translate verse 7 with this understanding and see if it fits: ***But to each one of us grace to minister in the spiritual gifts has been given as Christ apportioned it.*** This works!

God's grace gifts include the gifts of the Spirit spelled out in 1 Cor. 12, God's gifts that compels or motivates ministry spelled out in Rom. 12 and God's vocational gifts spelled out Eph. 4:11-14.

The thing I want you to see is that this verse says, "to each one of us." The Biblical truth is each one of us are assigned different kinds of ministries; whether at church, at home or in the marketplace and we are equipped with the grace gifts we need to be fruitful in them.

Ephesians 4:8, "This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.'"

Here Paul is showing us why Jesus is apportioning gifts to enhance our ministries through using an illustration that was common to those in ancient times.

When a king or general came back victorious from a battle, he would lead a parade with his army throughout his kingdom showing all the spoils of war they collected along with the nobles and citizens that had been taken captive. There the victorious King would give gifts from the plunder to those who lined the streets celebrating the victory.

This illustration tells us two things we need to understand about grace gifts. First, the grace gift that the Lord is entrusting to you is a direct result of celebrating His full victory of the cross, His death, His resurrection and His ascension to His Throne.

Second, this means that expressing our grace gifts should reflect the things we see from our Lord's victory i.e. His living presence, His love, His forgiveness, His healing, His council etc. Who are these captives Jesus is leading? Our next verse gives us an indication.

Ephesians 4:9, "What does 'he ascended' mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions?"
We have to understand that by the victory of the cross through His resurrection the Lord made Heaven accessible for all who believed.

The reason why the Lord went to the lower earthly regions, known by the Jews as Sheol (the grave), was to take captive to Himself those souls who had loved and had faith in God during their life and lead them with Him to their forever home in heaven.

From that day on when a believer dies his soul/spirit does not go to Sheol but directly to heaven to be present with the Lord in their heavenly bodies. Think of it, it has been a 2000-year parade of saved souls from earth to heaven because of the victory of our Lord. When we minister with His grace gifts we are affirming that the parade is still in progress.

Ephesians 4:10. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.
Why would Jesus need to fill the whole universe? In His divine nature he always has been in all places at all times. He says in *Jeremiah 23:24, "Can anyone hide in secret places so I cannot see him?" declares the Lord. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord.*

But He had to also ascend as our Risen Savior so that He will permeate the universe with the glory of His reigning redemption.

Just think, now the whole universe is filled with the power of His shed blood and resurrected life! (see Hebrews 9:23-24). And so, we live worthy of our calling by expressing God's grace gifts as they affirm Jesus is alive and reigning as Lord over all things created.

For this reason, we are all called to eagerly desire the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:1).