

This morning, we are continuing in our journey through the Book of Ephesians.

Let's read **Ephesians 4:7-16** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."⁹ (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

As is true to all sections of Scripture, there is so much contained in this section – we'll break it down into a couple of bite sized chunks over the next couple of weeks. If I had to communicate a 30k foot view principle that we'll look at in these 10 verses, it would be Function over Form as it relates to the Church.

In the Western church the emphasis is often on Form – Structure – Hierarchy – Organization, etc. Over the last few decades in particular there has a definite shift in how many see the Church in America in particular. The shift has been focused more on a business model for developing and evaluating the Church. We need to remember that Biblical Function should drive Operational Form, not the other way around.

While it has been helpful to institute some helpful thinking and practices in the operation of various aspects of the Church, it's easy to subtly lose focus on the true nature of the Church. If we are not careful, we can elevate Form over Function and in the worst-case scenario the Form actually becomes the Function and the Church no longer aligns to the heart of the Father and how He intended it to be. The Church can still do good things, help people, serve the community, etc. but the vibrant and powerful organic organism that is described in the Bible is not functioning as described and intended.

If we are going to seriously talk about the Function of the Church – it has to be properly anchored in His Grace:

Verse 7: *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

We know that Jesus is the Head of the Church (**Colossians 1:8**) *and He is the Chief Cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22)* – as such, **the Church is anchored in Christ, the fullness of Grace and Truth**

John 1:14-17 *And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ John testified about Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'" ¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace. ¹⁷ For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.*

The thread of Grace is woven through every aspect of our individual experience as a part of the Church/Body and our corporate experience as the Church/Body.

If we see Grace, in its fullness, as the foundation of the Church we are less likely to drift away from the Divine Function of the Church and get caught up with preoccupation of perfecting the Form of the Church.

Again, we must remember that Biblical Function should drive Operational Form – not the other way around. Staying anchored to Grace and Truth (Jesus – the Head and Chief Cornerstone) will help us to not drift.

Let's refresh our memory concerning the thread of Grace in the tapestry of our lives as parts of the Church/Body of Christ.

We are saved by the Gift of God's Grace

Ephesians 2:8,9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Our Identity in Christ and effectiveness in Christ is anchored in Grace

1 Corinthians 15:10 *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*

Hale Pule Question:

Think about how your identity is anchored. For some people it's their job, accomplishments, net worth, looks, skills, etc. For most it's a sliding scale that fluctuates with their emotions, circumstance, etc. Describe what it

means to you that our identity should be anchored in Grace. How can you grow in the truth that your true identity is anchored in His Grace?

We are equipped to minister by the Gift of His Grace

Ephesians 4:7,8;11,12 *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;*

Any "ministry" we are assigned to has at its foundation the testimony of His Grace

Acts 20:24 *But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*

We serve through the Gift of Grace

1 Peter 4:10 *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Hale Pule Question:

Think about your life: your vocation, your surroundings, your relationships, your activities, etc. Think of how the Father could be assigning you to be a minister/ambassador of His in each of those situations. How can you reflect and "testify" of His Grace? Do you recognize any gifts that He's given you that you can steward as a servant and vessel of His Grace? Write them down and pray regularly that Holy Spirit will help make you more aware of the opportunities all around you to be an ambassador of Grace.

His Grace empowers us even in the midst of our own weakness and bad circumstances

2 Corinthians 12:9 *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

Hebrews 4:16 *Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

We overcome by the Gift of Grace

Titus 2:11,12 *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,*

Hale Pule Question:

How can you rely more on His Grace to persevere through weaknesses, overcome temptation, and/or find help in your time of need?

Next week we will continue talking about Function versus Form in the context of “Leadership” in the Church.