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**Main Idea:** Each of us has been given an incredible gift beyond measure. This gift is grace which we do not deserve. This is a gift from the person and work of Jesus Christ, Who ascended from this earth and death to give us life. To continue the ministry of the Church, Christ gave us people to administer its communal life and work. He gave us advocates and speakers of His Word and people to give voice to it outside of its walls. He gives us people to shepherd, to teach, and to equip so we all can be inspired and trained to carry on the service and the building up of the Church. We are to carry these works out in unity and in faith. Our maturity in His fullness for His glory will build up the Church, even grow. We are not to be immature--whining and selfish, succumbing to any whim and desire. We are not to be fools who fall for false teaching, being early deceived and scheming and deceiving others. We are called to be a mature people of real faith and love, knowing God's true Truth and always treating one another in such love. It is Christ who is the Church, and we are His body joined together. He is our head, overall, and what we are doing is hinges on Him and is supported by Him for Him. We need one another, or we will not work right.

### Contexts and Background:

Paul draws upon and quotes Psalm 68:18 to hone his point: God is going up and taking Moses to Mt. Sinai as God 'arising' to Jesus distributing the blessings to those below. This is to give instruction of a hierarchy in the Church for proper function and for knowing our roles to serve and equip and in Whom we are to be aligned to.

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Grace has been given.* This grace of God has an incredible cost that we did not nor could hope to pay. Christ paid the price for us. We are by the grace of God, through faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. We are free from the debt of sin and the frustration of searching because our debt has been paid in Christ; in this truth, in Christ, we find our joy and contentment in Christ (Rom. 8:1, 31-39; 12; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 2:14-15; 10:5; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Thess. 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:3-4)!
- *Christ apportioned.* In context, we are all apportioned for different functions with the abilities to meet them. This is about our justification in Christ and in community to others, too. He loves you and others, too! Diversity in unity goes together as cooperation. It is the responsibility of the Believers to the church Body to know their gifts and exercise them. We have unity and diversity in the Body when we trust and obey Christ as Lord. This is necessary to our functioning together. We are to see our differences as filling each other's gaps and deficiencies (1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 4:7-15).
- *Ascended on high.* This is Christ's victory over death and His ascent into heaven.
- *Took many captives.* This is how death is taken captive by Christ's victory on the cross (Psalm, 68; Col. 2:15).
- *Gave gifts.* These are the spiritual gifts and the role of the Holy Spirit gifting us. In community, we share a faith that powers our gifts to be used with and for one another (Acts 2:32-33; Rom. 12).
- *Lower, earthly regions.* This refers to the place of the dead; Jesus dies and arose. This also refers to His incarnation coming to earth as a man to serve (Psalm 139:15; Ezek. 32:24; Phil. 2:1-11).
- *Apostles.* This refers to those who are sent with authority. It also refers to the founders of the Church, directly disciples and commissioned by Jesus. Today, they exercise general leadership over a number of churches, with an extraordinary authority in spiritual matters, which is spontaneously recognized and appreciated by those churches--such as, a Bishop or Elders. This is not the same as

the original twelve Apostles, or Paul (John 20:21; Acts 1:21-22; 14:14, 37; 15:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:28; 15:1-9; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 2:7-10; Eph. 3:1-9; 4:11-14; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:8, 15; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 2 Pet. 3:15-16).

- *Prophets*. This means to speak forth. They speak for God, as to proclaim the Word of God with divine anointing, giving exhortation and encouragement which brings conviction to the hearers so they recognize that it is truly the Word of God and they must do something about it. A prophet is also someone who keeps the church on God's path and truth and makes sure we do not slip into false teaching. This is not the same as an OT prophet, which existed before the Word was completed; there is no new teaching or revelation. There are new ways to apply God's truth, but not new truth (Acts 2:37-40; Mat. 7:54; Acts 26:24-29; 1 Cor. 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 1:5).
- *Evangelists*. This refers to the proclaiming the Good News. They share and explain the Gospel message with unbelievers to become Jesus' disciples and responsible members of the body of Christ (Acts 8:5-6; 8:26-40; 14:21; 21:8; 1 Cor. 1:17; Eph. 4:11-14; 2 Tim. 4:5).
- *Pastors*. These are shepherds of God's people. They assume a long-term personal responsibility for the spiritual welfare and growth of a group of Believers with love, care, discipleship, and counseling, moving them to a deeper spiritual connection and maturity with Christ (Jer. 23:2-4; John 10:1-18; Acts 20:17-28; Eph. 4:11-14; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; 5:1-3).
- *Teachers*. These are people to instruct and expound to others accurately. They employ a logical, systematic approach to Biblical study with power and conviction,. They communicate that information in a clear, concise way that is relevant to the health and ministry of the Body and its members in such a way that others will be impressed and learn (Jer. 23:18-22; Acts 18:24-28; 20:20-21; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-14).
- *Equip/perfecting*. This refers to making a complete fit, to restoring (and is denoted as mending fishing nets). This is one of the main roles of the Church: To train people to know God's Word and the procedures of church life to know where they fit and how to serve for God' glory. This is people working together in Christ with one another, looking after each other, and bringing this model to the world around us (Matt. 4:21; Mark 1:19; Rom. 2:1-4; 12:9-21; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:16-23)!
- *Works of service/ministry*. In context, this refers to an "office" of the Church such as a deacon or staff person in ministry. Its application means we all serve; and, when we serve, we are serving Christ, His Hands in the world (Rom. 15:25; 16:1).
- *Body of Christ*. This is an analogy for the Church, a "shared" union with Christ, as each piece needs the other to function. It is a relationship of unity, deriving life in and from Him. Being of His membership means our identity is in Him; thus, we are affected personally and publicly, synergizing as a community that is formed, indwelt, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are all precious, important, and have jobs to do as a moving, living temple, reflecting His love and holiness. The Church is God's dwelling place and legacy, His training and worship center where people are empowered by Him to worship Him (Ex. 19:6; 2 Sam. 7:5-7, 12-16; Matt. 16:18; Mark 12:10-11; John 2:19; Acts 2:33; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 3:16; 15:45; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; Heb. 3:6; 7:26; 10:10; 1 Pet. 2: 4-10).
- *Built up/edifying*. This refers to building a house. God is the builder. We are to receive Christ as our foundation and continually adhere to His teachings. Then, we are to remain obedient so we can continue to live and serve in the Kingdom. It is more than just acceptance of the Truth and teaching about Christ; it means that we have to be affected and infused as His saving faith rescues us. This Truth must reach deep in our being so our minds, will, and lives to make Christ primary in us (Matt. 24:1; Mark 13:1-2; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:1; Eph. 2:21).

- *Mature/perfect.* This refers to having reached the goal or reaching for the goal, as a child grows into an adult or a student becomes a master or teacher. This is not merely knowledge or intellectual superiority. Maturity is more about understanding and applying the precepts of our Lord so that one's life is changed. Only when this maturity occurs can one have sound judgment and discernment. A mature person can handle life, setbacks, triumphs, and give Christ glory. This is predicated by a trust that goes deep within us and produces people who are not shallow but convicted and transformed. Knowledge, without the love of God in and through us, only makes one a more shrewd villain than a real Christian and no knowledge and only passion makes one a fool (2 Sam. 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9; Ezek. 44:23; Matt. 19:21; John 3:30; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil 1:6-11; 3:1-14; Col. 1:28; 4:12; Heb. 5:14).
- *Infants... tossed back and forth.* This refers to going astray and being blown off course. In context, being mature is what is essential for a healthy church to function.
- *Every wind of teaching.* This is about all teaching—correct and counterfeit. This is about what was revealed by the Apostles at that time and by God's Word for all time. This is not just about doctrine; it is also about character, virtue, and faithfully following Christ and living for Him. True teachers correct what is false and do not appeal to people's vanity; rather, they seek to glorify Christ (Matt. 24:4-5, 11; Acts 20:29-30; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:4, 8, 18, 20-23; 2 Thess. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-8; 1 John 2:18-19, 22-23; 2 John 7-11; Jude 3-4).
- *Cunning.* Those who trick people by a charismatic personality or make up events or visions to further their own agendas and their personal glory. In contrast, real prophets were humble and proclaimed what God had clearly revealed. Real prophets pointed to Christ, not to themselves. Real prophets present His heart to ours without contradiction or personal gain and power (2 Kings 18:19; Isaiah 9:13-17; Jer. 5:31; 14:14; 23:16-32, Ezek. 13:3-101 Cor. 5:13; 7:40; 12:4; 14; 1 Pet. 1:10-12;) 2 Peter 1: 12-21; 2:1).
- *Head.* Real ministry exists solely by God's grace; and, so must we! People, Christians, and ministry all exist because of Christ's work of grace. Never forget who you are! We must never allow our leadership positions to "puff us up!"
- *Joined and held together.* We must have a correct self-image of ourselves, others around us, and who we are in relationship with our Lord. What He has done for us must permeate us! Our standing before our Lord is solely upon His mercy, thus we are to reciprocate it. Because God forgave us we need to forgive others... Thus, do not just ask God to use you, but rather give yourself to Him to use (John 3:30)!
- *In Love.* 'Agape' love, the most common word used, both as a noun and a verb in the New Testament. The greatest example of *agape* love is what our Lord Jesus Christ did when He died for our sins. God showed His love by taking our place and the wrath and punishment for our sins. He paid that price through His sinless life and His sacrifice on our behalf. God's *agape* love rescued us from the punishment that we deserved. Rather than receiving what we ought to have, we received His favor without earning it (Mark 12:28-31; John 3:16, Matt. 22:34-40; John 13:34-35; Rom. 1:31; 12:10; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:8; 3:6; 12; 4:9-10; 5:8; 13; 2 Tim. 3:3; 1 John 4:7-21).

### **Devotional Thoughts and Applications:**

We need to realize who we are in Christ, what He did so our lives. We are marked as His; we must know the impact of this so that we become His hands and feet to the world around us. Let us not be consumed by pettiness and pride; rather, let us have humility and character, kindness and encouragement, authenticity and confidence. Because we have received His boundless riches, our accomplishment is who He is in us, not who we are in the world. For this to take place in our daily lives, we need to refocus our purpose to His, our thoughts to Him, our actions to his example. Christ does not give us disposition

and character; we develop these with His empowerment and fruit. We just allow our trust in Him to fuel our conviction, and we follow Christ to make it so.

**Church Leadership Tip:** We prepare God's people! The purpose of any worker in the church is to build up the people for service, whether it is a nursery worker or a bishop, a pastor, or elder. We serve Christ. By doing this, we build up His church. If we serve with a preoccupation on 'self' e.g. "it is all about me, my position, my name, my legacy, my veneration", we miss the entirety of who and why we are to lead and manage a church.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions, see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. How does it make you feel when Christian is scheming even teaching what is false?
2. How are you at becoming a servant of the Gospel? What gets in the way?
3. How does the message of Christ's Word penetrating, dwelling, impacting us so we are more in Him, that in our fears and desires?
4. Why is it that as a church we need one another or we will not work right?
5. How have you shared or served in your faith in community?
6. How does our collective faith and gifts used with and for one another?
7. Why is it important for a church to instruct and expound others accurately? What happens when we get blown off course?
8. Being freed from sin must show a response and a responsibility, so what is yours?
9. What happens to you when others show you kindness? How do you respond? Why does this matter? What does it do for a church? For a neighborhood?
10. How does your church stack up with the call from this passage to train its people to know God's Word and the procedures of church life to know where they fit in and how to serve for mutual benefit?
11. What can your church do to inspire its people to grow more in our Lord and be as He has called us to be?
12. What can your church do better to prepare God's people?