

Gift-giver and Protector

“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’” (vv. 7–8).

- [Ephesians 4:7–12](#)

Benefits flow from Christ’s seating at the right hand of the Father (His “session”) as well as from His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ’s glory as our Head, evident in His session at the Father’s right hand, benefits us because Jesus gives gifts to His church and protects us from our enemies (The Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 51).

Today’s passage is the basis for the catechism’s teaching on the blessings we receive from Christ’s session. [Ephesians 4:8](#) quotes [Psalm 68:18](#), but Paul uses the phrase “gave gifts” rather than “receiving gifts.” In his Ephesians commentary, Charles Hodge writes that Paul is not changing God’s Word; he is giving the general sense of Psalm 68, not a verbatim quote. This was a common Apostolic practice. Furthermore, Psalm 68 echoes Numbers 8 conceptually, as the Hebrew text of both passages is quite similar. Since Numbers 8 refers to God receiving the Levites as gifts only to give them back to Israel, [Psalm 68:18](#) indicates that the Lord’s reception of gifts is followed by His returning these gifts to His people. Paul was familiar with the original Hebrew and likely would have heard this echo as he read Psalm 68, so he brings out the distribution of said gifts explicitly in [Ephesians 4:8](#).

Paul’s main point here is that Christ pours out a multitude of gifts on His people through His Spirit. These gifts include the offices of prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher, and Apostle. These offices have been given to the church, some of them permanently, and others such as Apostle and prophet, temporarily, for the sake of mature and effective ministry (vv. 11–12). To this list we may also add gifts such as wisdom, discernment, and the others mentioned in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12.

The other benefit of Christ's session, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, is that "by his power [Christ] defends us and keeps us safe from all enemies." This is a clear implication of Psalm 68, as quoted in Ephesians 4, because Psalm 68 emphasizes God's victory over His foes. Christ has triumphed over His enemies; therefore, He can protect us from them. Even though these foes may sometimes seem to defeat us, we actually get the last laugh. The worst they can do is kill us, but what kind of victory is that if we will be resurrected to rule over them ([2 Tim. 2:12](#))?

Application for God

"The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still" is the cry of the believer's confidence in the protecting work of Christ. We may suffer in this world, but in Jesus we are kept from everlasting destruction. We, therefore, will rule and reign with Him over His enemies forever. Without minimizing the tragedies we face in this world, there is a sense in which we can laugh in the face of death and suffering because we are sure to overcome it in Christ.

Passages for Further Study

Esther 9

[Proverbs 21:31](#)

[John 10:27-30](#)

[Revelation 19:11-21](#)

