

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.” (Now this *expression*, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 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. As 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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, 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.” Ephesians 4:7-16, NAS95.

1) the distribution of the gifts 4:7-10

Several things are important to note:

* In vv. 1-6 the adjective one, had been used to emphasize unity. Now, in vv. 7-16, it refers to the many individuals who make up that unity.

* Note also that Paul shifts from his use of the second person plural "you" to the first person plural "we" in order to identify himself with his readers.

* There is a repeated emphasis on giving: in v. 7 Christ "gives according to the measure of his 'gift;'" in v. 8 he "gave gifts to men;" and again in v. 11 he "gave gifted people to the church."

- Previously Paul referred to the "grace" that had been given him for his ministry to the Gentiles (3:2,7,8). Now, however, "grace" is given to every believer for the good of the whole body.
- So, grace is multi-faceted, never lacks to meet every need of the church.

Paul finds support for this ministry of giving gifts in Psalm 68:18, which in its original context describes God's triumphant ascent of Mt. Zion after he had delivered his people. Here he seems to apply it to the triumphal ascension of Christ described earlier

in Eph. 1:20-23, "because he saw 'in Jesus' exaltation a further fulfillment of this triumph of God" (O'Brien, 289). The "host" of captives whom he led captive refers either to the principalities and powers (i.e., demonic spirits) who were placed in subjection to his rule (1:20-22; see also Col. 2:15) or to believers (cf. 2 Cor. 2:14). The former is more likely true.

There are two major interpretive problems in this text.

(1) The Hebrew text of Ps. 68:18 reads: 'You ascended to the heights, you led captive captives, you received gifts among men. Yet Paul renders this: "you gave gifts to men." What has happened? It would almost seem that Paul has turned the psalm on its head! Here are the possibilities:

* Some believe Paul was quoting the OT text from memory and unintentionally made a mistake. Others simply insist he deliberately altered the text to make a theological point. However, our understanding of divine inspiration renders this impossible.

* Others say that Paul was drawing on an ancient oral tradition reflected in the Aramaic Targum on the Psalms and the Syriac version of the OT (the Peshitta), both of which read: "Thou hast given gifts to men."

* Ellicott writes: "We admit, then, frankly and freely, the verbal difference, but remembering that the Apostle wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, we recognize here neither imperfect memory, precipitation . . . arbitrary change . . . accommodation . . . nor Rabbinical interpretation . . . , but simply the fact that the Psalm, and especially ver. 18, had a Messianic reference, and bore within it a further, fuller, and deeper meaning. This meaning the inspired Apostle, by a slight change of language, . . . succinctly, suggestively and authoritatively unfolds" (90).

* A somewhat elaborate view is that Psalm 68:18 is echoing or alluding to Num. 8:6-19 and 18:6 in which the Levites are "taken by the Lord from among the people" (8:6,14) who then gives them back so they might serve the congregation.

* Most point to the prevailing custom in the ancient world in which the victor not only received tribute but also distributed it among his own people. In other words, what conquerors took from their captives they then gave away to their own. "The spoils were divided, the booty was shared" (Stott)

157). Thus there is an anticipated "giving" implied in the Hebrew verb "receiving": one receives in order to give. "The giving" [of Ephesians 4], says Hengstenberg, 'presupposes the taking [of Psalm 68]; the taking is succeeded by the giving as its consequence. Thus the relation between receiving and giving, i.e., the idea that the latter is implicit in the former, is simply made explicit by Paul, similar to what we see in Acts 2:33 "Therefore, having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.

(2) The second major issue concerns the meaning of Christ's "descent" in v. 9. What does Paul when he says Christ descended "into the lower parts of the earth?" Again, here are the options:

* A few have argued that it refers to the conception of Jesus in the womb of Mary (see Ps. 139:15).

* Others have said it refers to his burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

* A long-standing view is that this describes Christ's descent or journey into Hades some time between his burial and resurrection. But the contrast in the verse is between an ascent to heaven and a descent from heaven, not a descent from earth to the underworld or the realm of the dead. Lincoln also contends that if Paul "had had three levels in mind and meant that Christ descended to the deepest level just as he ascended to the greatest height, he would have been more likely to have used a superlative [lowest] than a comparative [lower]" (245). Also, Paul has consistently referred to a "two-story cosmology" in Ephesians: heaven and earth; not a "three-story cosmology": heaven, earth, under the earth. Lincoln asks, how can a descent into

Hades be logically deduced from Christ's ascent to heaven, "which, after all, appears to be the force of the argument here" (245). Finally, this view is usually based on a similar interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18ff. But the latter, in my opinion, describes the triumphant proclamation of Christ to demonic spirits subsequent to his resurrection, at the time of his ascension, not prior to his resurrection while his body was yet in the grave.

* It is likely that the confusion surrounding this text is due to a mistranslation of the phrase "lower parts of the earth," as if Paul had in mind a realm or something beneath or within the earth itself. A better translation is: "the lower parts" which are the earth (i.e., 'of the earth would be a genitive of apposition which further defines or explains the preceding noun). "On this view the lower regions are not the lower parts of the earth but rather the lower parts of the cosmos, that is, the earth, and the writer is speaking of a descent to the earth" (Lincoln, 245). In other words, Paul's contrast is not between one part of the earth and another, lower, part, but between the whole earth and heaven. If that is the case, two options remain:

(a) Paul may be referring to the incarnation itself. This idea of the incarnation and exaltation of Christ in terms of descent and ascent is found in John's gospel (see 3:13; 6:62). Others would focus specifically on the element of Christ's humiliation and its contrast with his exaltation, as portrayed in Phil. 2:5-11.

(b) A more recent interpretation that is gaining a following says that the descent in view is that of Christ in the person and activity of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Thus the descent would be subsequent to the ascent (whereas in the view (a) the descent precedes the ascent). Appeal is made to Psalm 68 itself which came to be associated with Pentecost (some saw in it a reference to Moses' "giving of the law"). This view would certainly connect well with the emphasis in vv. 7 and 11 on the giving or distribution of spiritual gifts. The main objection, however, is that Pentecost is not typically thought of as a descent of Christ, but of the Spirit. Advocates respond by pointing to the numerous texts where Christ and the Spirit are closely related (cf. Rom.

8:9; 2 Cor. 3:18; etc.). Somewhat against this view is v. 10 (for the meaning of which, see 1:22-23) where the one who 'descended' is explicitly said to be Jesus.

2) the nature of the gifts 4:11

Here we are told explicitly what Christ gave. Before we look at these "gifts" we need to hear Lincoln's insightful observation on the relation of v. 11 to v. 10:

"In fact Christ has given these ministers as part of the overall purpose for which he ascended that his work of filling all things might be brought to completion. The link with the previous verse [v. 10] indicates that in the writer's vision Christ's giving of ministers of the word to build up the whole body into his fullness is interwoven with the goal of his pervading the cosmos with his presence and rule. This underlines the point the writer has already made in 1:22,23. God gives Christ as head over all to the Church, and it [the Church] becomes his instrument in carrying out his purposes for the cosmos. The readers are to see themselves as part of this Church which has a universal role and which is to be a pledge of the universe's ultimate unity in Christ. Now, the one who has been given to the Church as cosmic Lord, himself gives to the Church to equip it fully for its cosmic task" (248).

We now see that God not only gives grace to people. He also gives people to people who are 'graced with the ability to edify one another.

(1) Apostles (see Lesson #2)

(2) Prophets (see the discussion on Eph. 2:20; 3:5)

(3) Evangelists Are these itinerants who establish churches, or are they gifted individuals resident within the local church itself, functioning in some official capacity (see Acts 21:8 and 2 Tim. 4:5 for the only other NT occurrences of the noun)?

(4) Pastors This is the only place in the NT where the noun *poimen*, "shepherd" or "pastor" is used.

However, the cognate is used in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 (see also John 21:16). These are most likely the Elders or Overseers referred to in the pastoral epistles. Paul

may also have in mind those who have the gift of administration (1 Cor. 12:28).

These are the ones who "rule" (1 Thess. 5:12; Rom. 12:8).

(5) Teachers See 1 Cor. 12:28,29; 14:26; Rom. 12:7 (cf. Heb. 5:12; James 3:1; Acts 13:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11,13,16; 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:2,24; 3:16; 4:2,3; Titus 1:9; 2:1,7). Note Eph. 4:20-21.

Two additional comments are in order.

First, it should be noted that the definite article ("the") appears before each of the first three: apostles, prophets, and evangelists, whereas pastors and teachers are linked by a single article. Some grammarians contend this means they constitute one gift, not two, hence: pastor-teachers. The rest of the NT would indicate that:

- * All pastors are teachers
- * Not all teachers are pastors
- * All elders are pastors
- * All elders are teachers
- * Not all teachers are elders

Second, two related questions need to be answered: (1) "Do these persons receive the name they have been given simply because they perform certain functions from time to time or also because they occupy some clearly defined position within their communities?" (Lincoln, 252). (2) If the latter is the case, are these four/five "official" giftings to be viewed as comprising some sort of unique church authority, apart from which the local church cannot fully function, or are they listed here simply as random representatives of the many and various spiritual gifts bestowed by the Spirit? O'Brien believes these in v. 11 "are deliberately emphasized since they provide the church with the teaching of Christ for the edification of the body (v. 12) and for the avoidance of

3) the function of the gifts 4:12-16

a) their purpose v. 12

Verse 12 consists of three prepositional phrases: (1) "for the equipping of the saints," (2) "for the work of service (or ministry)," and (3) "to the building up of the body of Christ." There are two ways to interpret these phrases and thus the purpose of the gifts in v. 11. Grammatically speaking, either one is possible.

(1) The most popular view is that the first and second phrases are to be taken together, as expressing one idea. Thus, the gifted people of v. 11 have been given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. That is to say, all believers are the ones who do the work of ministry, having been equipped to do so by the gifted people of v. 11.

This will then contribute to the building up of the body of Christ. On this view, v. 12 is simply reiterating what both v. 7 and v. 16 assert, namely, that all believers, and not just a select few with special gifts, have received grace for ministry.

(2) Another interpretation is that all three prepositional phrases describe what the gifted people of v. 11 do in the church. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors/teachers have been given to the church so that they (the gifted people of v. 11) might equip the saints, so that they (the gifted people of v. 11) might do the work of ministry, so that they (the gifted people of v. 11) might build up the body of Christ. Lincoln advocates this view and says: "All believers are to be brought to a state of completion, and it is the ministers Christ has given who are the- (I would say A)means to this end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership" (254). If this view is correct, one need not fear that all other believers are relegated to so-called "lay" status in the church. Again, vv. 7 and 16 both explicitly assert that all Christians have been gifted in order that they might serve and minister and contribute to the growth and well-being of the body of Christ. Only pastor/teacher of these four exists today.

As for the two/three tasks themselves:

* The word translated "equipping" = to complete, restore, repair. See the cognate verb form in 1 Thess. 3:10; Gal. 6:1; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Rom. 9:22 (cf. also Heb. 13:21; 1 Pt. 5:10). It can even have the force of repairing or setting a broken bone, i.e., mending that which has been damaged.

* The word "service" = ministry, the word also used to describe the more official capacity of "deacon" in the local church (see Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:5; Col. 4:17).

* The word rendered "building up" = the standard Pauline term for edification (see 1 Cor. 14).

b) their goal v. 13

The ultimate aim of these many activities and expressions of service is variously stated:

First, these gifts are to operate "until we all attain to the 'unity' of the faith" (v. 13a). The unity which, according to 2:15-18, already exists, and which, according to 4:3, must be diligently preserved, now, according to v. 13, is still to be 'attained. Also, whereas our "one faith" was described in 4:5 as a given, Paul here envisions the full appropriation of that oneness of faith as something that lies in the future. Paul has in mind a progressive movement among all believers toward the full experience, appropriation and application of the objective doctrinal content of the Christian 'faith.

Does the use of the word 'until in v. 13 have any implications for the duration of the "gifts" described in v. 11?

Second, there is also a unity that consists in our "knowledge" of the Son of God. We are together to increase in our understanding and enjoyment of 'the unfathomable riches of Christ (3:8). The many and varied spiritual gifts bestowed upon the church are designed to enable us all, unity, to grow and deepen and expand and increase in our knowledge of Jesus.

Third, we are grow up into a "mature man" (cf. 2:15 where Paul spoke of God creating from Jew and Gentile "one new man").

Fourth, as for the standard of our attainment: it is the fullness of Jesus, i.e., the complete expression of all that he is as God incarnate (cf. 3:19). The point is that the church is progressively being conformed to the perfect image of Jesus in all his fullness. 'The glorified Christ, says Bruce, "provides the standard at which his people are to aim: the corporate Christ [i.e., the church] cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ" (350-51).

c) their result vv. 14-16

Here Paul mixes his metaphors and draws upon vivid imagery to describe the results, both individually and corporately, of the proper use of spiritual gifts and gifted persons in the body of Christ.

* The proper use of spiritual gifts can greatly reduce spiritual immaturity in the body, portrayed here by the word translated "children" (v. 14a), a term set in contrast to the "mature man" of v. 13. We are to imitate children in their humility and innocence but not in their ignorance and instability. For Paul "immaturity is evidenced in instability, rootlessness, lack of direction, doctrinal vacillation, and susceptibility to manipulation and error" (Lincoln, 257). His language is vivid: "tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine" (v. 14b). The picture is of a tiny, storm-tossed, boat entirely at the mercy and whim of waves and wind. These metaphors, says O'Brien, "were natural for ancient peoples, who were afraid of voyaging and of the omnipotence of both wind and waves." Note the vivid description in Ps. 107:23-27 of the impression made by the raging sea on those who were not seafarers (309). Thus there is only confusion and lack of direction, in direct contrast to the clearly stated goal-oriented language of v. 13. Cf. James 1:6; Jude 12-13. Immaturity is especially evident when believers are easily duped by false teaching and always seem to embrace whatever new theological fad is being promoted. "Every wind of teaching" is in obvious contrast with the "unity of the faith" in v. 13. In other words,

the lack of theological discernment. Three phrases then explain what lies behind such threatening teachings:

(1) "by the trickery of men" The word translated "trickery" literally referred to the throwing of dice

(kubēia; from which we derive the English word "cube"). False teaching acts "like a wary and dexterous gambler, . . . winning by dishonesty without being suspected of it" (Eadie, 316). There is nothing divine in this teaching: it is wholly of human origin (cf. Col. 2:8).

(2) "by craftiness" This refers to the unscrupulous and deceitful way in which false teachers dupe the immature and unsuspecting. Pragmatism and manipulation are no doubt in view.

(3) "by the scheming of deceit" The word "scheming" (cf. Eph. 6:11, where it is used of the devil) indicates that there is a method or plan to their action. The word "deceit" indicates that it is often difficult to detect.

* On a more positive note, the proper functioning of spiritually gifted people in the church should result in spiritual growth whereby all are brought into conformity with Jesus, the head of the body (v. 15). The phrase "speaking the truth in love" is designed to contrast with the concluding words of v. 14. In other words, Paul isn't exhorting us to truthfulness in general or merely that we are to be kind when interacting verbally with one another. Rather he is calling on us to proclaim the doctrinal truth of Christianity, i.e., the 'faith (2:5,13), as over against the "error" of false teachers, and to do so in love. There is actually a chiasmic structure here:

A speaking the truth

B in love

B by craftiness

A of deceit

* Paul's concluding comments in v. 16 are a concentrated focus on both the unity of the one body and the contribution to the latter's growth by each individual believer. The words 'from whom (v. 16a) have as their antecedent Christ, the head, indicating that no growth is possible apart from living, vital, trusting union with him. Note several things:

The phrase "being fitted" uses a word found in Eph. 2:21 where Paul described the church as a building. The second phrase, "held together," was used often in contexts of reconciliation (see Col. 2:19). Taken together, they "underline forcefully that for the unified growth of the body its members have to be involved in a process of continual mutual adjustment" (Lincoln, 262).

All this is accomplished as a result of "what every joint supplies," not just what the professional or ordained clergy supply! The word "joint" may be translated "ligament," the idea being that each individual believer, through the proper exercise of his/her gift and ministry, provides the necessary connections between the various parts of the body and thereby mediates life and imparts power throughout the entire church. The emphasis on what each and every believer contributes continues: "according to the proper working of each individual part."

In this way the various parts of the body all contribute to the building up of the corporate church in love. This climactic stress on the role of love should not be missed. "Love is the lifeblood of this body, and, therefore, the ultimate criterion for the assessment of the Church's growth will be how far it is characterized by love" (Lincoln, 264).