

Ephesians 4:7-10

Captivity Captive

Passage

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.) - NASU

Exposition

Ephesians 4:7

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

A switch from unity and oneness from earlier parts of the chapter Paul moves to diversity within the unity. Grace, as previously defined, is the unlimited, unmerited blessings of God due to the totally adequate work of Christ on the cross. This verse helps enunciates the unmerited nature of grace but calls us to carefully evaluate the measure of Christ's gift. Given that the gift cost His life on our behalf and it was able to purchase us eternal life we gain a sense of awe and reverence for the measure of Christ's gift. The Greek word for measure is μέτρον (metron) which carries with it the idea of a measuring rod or ruler. On top of the richness of the love God has given us in the body (Eph. 3:17-19), on top of the call for us to have a character that reflects the work of God in our lives (Eph. 4:1-6), God has gifted each one of us with grace which is measured in comparison to the infinite and amazing gift of eternal life given through Christ. Paul re-iterates the same concept he emphasized in chapter 2:8-9 where he clearly states that grace is a gift and is not earned and is not through works. The measure of Christ's gift takes the measurement of outward works we're often challenged by and crucifies it with the flesh.

The nature of God's grace would have much cultural significance because it reflected value and solidarity where the social constructs of slavery, Roman and non-Roman citizenship, Jews and Gentiles and religious idiosyncrasies of mystery cults would have weighed heavily on the mind of the believer. Similarly within the body of Christ today where denominational boundaries exist that ebb and flow from existentialism to mysticism to legalism we're called to operate in a context of grace. This doesn't cause us to stop pursuing doctrinal truth, edification and corporate spiritual growth, but it does offer us an alternative to painful abrasion.

Questions for Discussion & Meditation

How does our perspective on eternal security (assurance) impact our view of the gift of Christ?

How does your perspective of the gift of Christ impact your view of grace?

Ephesians 4:8

Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

Paul summarizes *all* of Psalm 68 and ties it into an application of Christ's giving gift to the church. It changes some words from 68:18 particularly "He" and "Gave". The giving reflects Psalm 68:9-10,35 and God's provision and generosity. Not all of 68:18 is quoted which reflects that nature of verse numbers being added later in the preservation of the scriptures (about 1200 A.D.). This apostolic application extends beyond the apparent original intent of Psalm 68 and is given a new New Testament context. Paul reminds the believers that they were captive to sin and the flesh before but that the Lord has lead them out of slavery to sin and unto a newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Questions for Discussion & Meditation

Do you think of yourself more as a captive of sin (conditionally) or as a redeemed captive (positionally)?

Do you primarily view other believers conditionally or positionally?

Ephesians 4:9

(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?...)

Paul goes on to further explain his use of the Psalm 68 passage. His assertion of the ascension applying to Christ comes with a logically opposite idea requiring the presence of God on the earth through the concept of descent. Christ's descent is a critical concept in that it reflects upon Christ's earthly conception on the earth through the Holy Spirit and Mary. The "Hypostatic Union" or the joining of God and Man in one person, the Messiah, is critical in our understanding of who Christ was, but also how Christ could accomplish redemption and substitutionary atonement. If Christ was merely an inspired man it would not have been enough to propitiate for our sins. If Christ had only appeared in a visionary or non-human form such as in Acts 9 to Paul, it would have failed to reflect an adequate federal head. The 'adequate' part of our definition of grace requires the hypostatic union. In John's gospel he clarifies the doctrine in verse 1:14 where the word becomes flesh and dwelt among men. Had the truth of God come in a non-substantive form it would have changed the dynamic of the gospel, it would have been super-natural, but not substitutionary.

In the New Testament the concept of descending does not show up anywhere to reflect Christ descending into hell or the inner-parts of the earth. If Christ descended he would not have been able to say to the thief on the cross next to Him, "Today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43)". That definitely does not sound like hell. Philippians 2:5-8

describes the descending and ascending of Christ with no mention of hell within the process. This verse could probably be better translated as, "...the lower parts, the earth." The word Ge (γῆ - pronounced like gay) carries with it the idea of dirt, land or plowable land, it should not be understood as subterranean hell or middle of the earth purgatory.

Questions for Discussion & Meditation

Does this verse imply our identification with Christ in His ascension?

Where have you learned about the concepts of Christ being 100% man and 100% God [if anywhere]?

What are some heresies that are commonly taught about the hypostatic union?

Ephesians 4:10

(... He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

Jews had three uses for the word we translate heaven: 1) Raining or cloudy Heavens, 2) Outer space or 3) Eternal Heaven. It seems to reflect in Paul's logic that Christ ascended beyond the heavens that fit into a time-space continuum context and dwells in the eternal heavens. Colossians 3:1-3 also reiterates this fact.

Paul then closes the verse with the clause, "so that He might fill all things." Paul references back to verse 4:6 where God the Father is "...over all, through all, and in all." This harkens back to the results of reckoning (Romans 6:11), the call to agency (Romans 12:13), the quality of works that God has in store for us (Ephesians 2:10), and the power with which the works will be done (Ephesians 1:23, 3:19 & 5:18). Paul uses plēroō (πληρώω) for which is translated to filling. The concept carries with it a sense of being filled to capacity or overflowing. There is complete adequacy in the filling, much like grace. The word for 'all things' here constitutes the whole of the church and not every thing that is in existence. That is to say that the Lord does not indwell everything with the Holy Spirit.

Questions for Discussion & Meditation

How do you perceive the filling of the Holy Spirit in your life?

When you recognize that other believers (all!) are filled with the Holy Spirit does that effect your expectation to learn from them?

When you recognize that the Holy Spirit is *not* guiding your words or actions how do you respond?

How do you deal with the flesh's natural response to conviction by feeling guilty?