

Captivating Grace and Manifold Gifts – *Ephesians 4:7-10*

Introduction – We are still in the section of the first commands given in Ephesians. Vv1-3 called us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Vv4-6 described the foundation of unity which already exists. Vv7-10 surprisingly reveals to us the diversity of gracious gifts we each receive by which we will be able to keep that unity, and vv11-16 will show us great detail of how that divinely given diversity will grow us up into even greater fullness. This section (vv7-10) emphasizes the great cosmic upheaval that has occurred because of Christ's ascension to the throne of grace.

The Text – *"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸ Therefore He says: 'When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.'⁹ (Now this, 'He ascended'—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)"*

Unity not Uniformity (v7) – In spite of the fact that we are one body, our unity is not uniformity in the same way that an eye does not look like or act like a toe. Paul discusses this in much greater detail in 1 Cor 12 (see esp. vv4-7). This kind of diversity, far from destroying unity, will, if graciously and properly used, promote it.

Grace and Gifts – This is a design feature of the body. It is not that we simply get to be whatever we want to be. We are endowed with gifts from God and with those gifts come more particular callings, opportunities and responsibilities. The words, "grace" and "gifts" remind us that, whatever our attainments, we may not boast in them, but give thanks for them and humbly place ourselves under deeper obligations to God's purposes.

"According to the Measure of Christ's Gift" – The measure of Christ's gift is infinite and so is the grace and graces He bestows. How then do we end up with differing gifts? This is Trinitarian reality – infinite and full yet diverse and individual.

The Ascension of Jesus Christ (vv8-10) – Here is the basis for Christ's authority to give infinite gifts to His body. Here is the picture of the victorious Warrior returning from battle with His booty and spoils of war. But look closely, something changed, something has been turned upside-down.

Psalms 68 – This is a war-psalm and a psalm of ascension victory. It begins with the battle cry which Israel was to sing as she went out in the wilderness, following the glory cloud (v1, Num 10:35). As God led them out, they were to watch as their enemies were easily driven away (vv1-2). When God marched, the earth shook (v7), His Word of victory went forth (v11), the enemies were put down (vv21-23), and a host of captives brought back (vv17-18). Because of His might, God would receive gifts from the kings of the earth and Jerusalem would be praised by the whole world (vv28-35). Israel was to sing this Psalm with the astounding confidence of victory over all of God's enemies that the verses required. They were to sing with faith.

The Application to Jesus Christ – Paul interprets this as a gospel-war-psalm; the song is about the triumph of Jesus Christ over all the earth. But now, instead of taking his enemies and slaying them, *"he led captivity captive"* refers to the taking of His enemies and making them His friends (do we learn here how to interpret all those bloody psalms?). He procured our redemption, our freedom, our deliverance from our bondage to sin, and we are now under a new kind of captivity (Rom 6:17-18). We are *"in Christ."* We are, like Paul, prisoners of the Lord Jesus (Eph 4:1). Rather than receiving gifts from His captives, what we find is that our Lord gives gifts to them. This is the work of grace. It is the work of the confident Victor Who has been given all things by His Father. This is why, in *"coming to Christ,"* there is both that terrible sense of losing everything and that exhilarating sense of receiving it all (Luke 9:23-25).

The Way Up is Down – *"...what does it mean but that He also first descended..."* Again, Paul speaks about this more elsewhere (Phil 2:5-11). The pattern of gospel victory is death and then resurrection. It is humility and then exaltation (1 Pet 5:5b-7). And then in that exaltation, it is exaltation to serve, to give – out of confidence in the Father that He is giving, that Christ is giving, that the Spirit is giving. Christ gave gifts confident of His position at the right hand of the Father. We give from our gifts, we give our gifted lives away, confident of our position in Him.

"That He Might Fill All Things" – We started by talking about unity but we seemed to have spent our time in a parenthesis, a rabbit trail of sorts. But it isn't. Our unity is in Christ because we are all captives in Christ. We have all died in Christ and been raised in Christ and are seated with Christ and have been gifted by Christ. Remember the prayer of Eph 1:15-23 which ends, *"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."* Go back to 4:1 – this is how you walk worthy of the calling; this is how you live with all lowliness and gentleness; this is how you bear with one another in love. It is all grace, overflowing grace, from Christ to you. We are captives of grace bearing the manifold gifts particularly given to each of us for building up the unity of the faith – (more on that next time).