

Protecting Christian variety – gifts for the Church

• **God's grace given in different measures**

Paul moves from protecting the **unity** of the church ^{☐1} to protecting the **variety** of the church ^{☐2}. Verse 7 begins with 'But'. *'But to each one of us grace has been given, according to the measure of the gift of Christ'* ^{☐3}. We keep the unity of the Spirit, **but** God's grace has been given in different **measures** to each Christian. Each Christian has a measure of God's grace to use in the fellowship. This means that each Christian has a different place in the fellowship. No two Christians are identical. No Christian has all spiritual gifts. No one spiritual gift is given to all Christians. We find our place in God's church by being ourselves under God, not by fitting any special mould or copying any spiritual mentor too closely. We keep the unity of the Spirit; we keep the variety of the Spirit also.

^{☐1} 4:1-6
^{☐2} 4:7-10

^{☐3} 4:7

Verses 8-10 go on to speak of what it is that enables Christ to give gifts to His church. *'Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led a host of prisoners captive, and He gave gifts to His people"*.
^{☐1}

^{☐1} 4:8

• **Psalm 68:18 fulfilled**

Where does this grace of God given to each Christian come from? It comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. He – says Paul – is the fulfilment of Psalm 68:18.

• **Enemies scattered**

Psalm 68 is the description of a procession. God is pictured as marching from Sinai to the land of Canaan. His enemies are scattered before Him as He journeys forward. *'God will arise, His enemies will be scattered'* ^{☐1}. Then God ascended Mount Sinai. *'With divine chariots, twenty thousand of them, thousands upon thousands, the Lord is among them on Sinai, in the holy place'* ^{☐2}.

^{☐1} Psalm 68:1

^{☐2} Psalm 68:17

• **God ascends Mt Sinai and Mt Zion**

Then God ascended Mount Zion. *'You have gone up on high. You led away captive a procession of conquered enemies. You received gifts consisting of people, people who were once rebels, so that the Lord might dwell with them'* ^{☐1}.

^{☐1} as 68:18 may be translated

• **King David and his captives**

One can see why Paul would use Psalm 68:18 here. It is about God making a dwelling-place, a temple on Mount Zion, Jerusalem. Through King David God takes many prisoners captive and He makes them part of Israel! He takes prisoners captive in order to dwell among them. This is exactly what Paul has been saying throughout Ephesians. God takes hold of people who are dead in trespasses and sins, and then He incorporates them into His new temple, the church. They become fellow-citizens with the saints, members of God's new Jerusalem. They become a holy temple in the Lord. God takes **gentiles** captive to make them into His servants. Jesus ascended not into the heights of Sinai, not to the heights of Zion, but into heaven. From His position in heaven as the king of His church, He takes gentiles into His new temple the church.

• **King Jesus and his captives**

• **Jesus return his captives as gifts for the church**

Paul adapts Psalm 68 ('You received gifts') and changes the wording ('You gave gifts'). It is a way of applying Psalm 68 to the New Testament situation. It is not a 'pure' quotation of Psalm 68; it is an **exposition** of Psalm 68 in the light of what happened in the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit. The people that He captured as gifts for Himself – many of them gentiles – He gave back to His church as gifts for the church. Verse 11 of Ephesians 4 continues: *'And it was he who gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists...'*

• **Jesus descended to the lowest place leaving no part of the universe unconquered**

Paul adds a further point of exposition. 'Now this phrase "He ascended" what can it mean but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ^{☞1}. He who descended is the same One also who ascended far above all the heavens, in order that He might fill all things' ^{☞2}.

☞1 4:9

☞2 4:10

Jesus ascended into heaven, but He also descended into 'the lower parts of the earth'. What does this 'lower parts of the earth' mean? Is it a reference to His coming to planet earth as a man, 'down to the very earth' (as the New English Bible has it)? Does it refer to the depths of His suffering on the cross (as John Calvin thought), or to His burial (as the Puritan Paul Bayne thought) or to the 'return' of Christ in the outpouring of the Spirit (as various scholars have said)? I think it means 'He descended to the lowest level of the universe, the realm of the dead'. Paul divides the world into three (see Philippians 2:10, heaven ... earth ... the depths). In His ascension Jesus becomes King over every section of the world. He 'descended' and 'ascended' 'in order that He might fill all things'. He leaves no part of the universe unconquered. Paul has already said in Ephesians that Jesus' kingship involves the conquering of death (1:20 as a preliminary to being the head of His church ^{☞1}). The thought is the same here.

☞1 1:21-23

• **The King of the universe gives people to be a blessing to the church**

Jesus, the conqueror of death, fills the universe with His power. He is head over all things for the church. From His position a King of the universe, He gives **people** to be blessings to His church. 'And it was He who gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers...' ^{☞1}.

☞1 4:11

• **Post ascension apostles – church planters**

Jesus gives apostles to His church. Paul is not referring here to the Twelve, but to apostles who are given **after the ascension**. There are different kinds of apostles. Paul refers here to what I call 'post-ascension apostles', people who plant churches and are used in the same way as Paul and others for reaching large areas for Christ. Only the first generation were a foundation for the **universal** church, but a very similar kind of Christian preacher is still given to the church today. He no longer is a writer of part of the New Testament as Paul was. He cannot produce new doctrines, but he can reach continents for the Lord Jesus Christ.

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