

The Church, God's Plan for This Age: Every Member Ministry for Maturity in the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:7-10

August 16, 2020

In this passage focused on the life of the church, Christ takes a central place. Knowing the resurrected and ascended Son of God, experiencing his bestowal of grace, looking to him as the goal and example, following his leadership, and receiving His support are all essential to the proper growth and development of the community of believers, the local church.

1. A Powerful Assertion – Christ gives grace to every member to contribute to the growth of the body (7).
 - a. The Recipients of the Gift
 - i. “Every one” – Paul transitions from speaking of the unity of the body to its diversity; to each individual God has given a gift to contribute to the growth of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-31; Rom 12:3-8). It is interesting that these two lists are different, indicating that these lists are likely not exhaustive.
 - ii. “of us” – Paul includes himself; each of us are recipients of God's grace for service.
 - b. The Bestowal of the Gift
 - i. “grace” – specific divine manifestations of grace for service that God bestows on all believers.
 - ii. “is given” – this gifting happens to all believers.
 - iii. “according to the measure of the gift of Christ” – Christ is the one Who bestows these gifts according to His sovereign plan, not according to our merit or good works.
2. An Old Testament Picture – the victorious King conquers his enemies and distributes gifts to his people (8-10)
 - a. In support of his assertion that Christ bestows spiritual gifts to men Paul quotes Psalm 68:18.
 - i. Psalm 68 is a prayer that the God will manifest His power, strengthen His people, and defeat the enemies of Israel.
 - ii. Paul interprets this Psalm Christologically, seeing within it Christ's power to save His church from their enemies, the hostile supernatural powers that once enslaved them.
 - iii. Just as God is the triumphant Divine Warrior who, after He ascended his throne, received gifts of homage from his captives, Christ is depicted as the triumphant Divine Warrior who, after He ascended to His throne, blesses His people with gifts.
 - b. A New Testament Fulfillment – Christ is our victorious King (9-10).
 - i. Paul claims that Christ's ascent implies a descent.
 - ii. “descended...lower parts of the earth” – In the Ephesians' day, the goddess Hekate, the goddess of witchcraft and sorcery, the goddess of the underworld, wielded keys to unlock the gates of Hades to release demonic powers against her enemies. Paul seems to call up this imagery to show that before Christ's ascension, He proclaimed a message of victory over these rebellious demonic powers.
 - iii. “the same also that that ascended up far above all heavens” – Christ arose victorious over all principalities and powers (cf. 1:21). By asserting that Christ has been raised high above all the heavens, Paul stresses the supremacy of Christ over all things, including the hostile principalities and powers (1 John 4:4; James 4:7).
 - iv. “that he might fill all things” – now at the right hand of God, Christ is unfolding a comprehensive plan for the universe, extending his reign over all of his enemies which involves filling the church for its evangelistic ministry and helping them defeat the power of the enemy in their lives.
 - c. Application: Our victorious Christ is actively serving and leading his church in victory over evil.
 - i. Christ's descent to the underworld emphasizes His victory over the powers of evil. These evil spirits are His captives. Since many of Paul's readers feared the underworld and the various spiritual beings associated with it, Paul's emphasis on this truth would have provided comfort and confidence.
 - ii. Christ's ascension high above all the heavens to the right hand of the Father accentuates His victory and sovereignty over the principalities and powers (1:21). Christ now occupies a position of supremacy over every conceivable supernatural or human enemy who would seek to deceive and destroy the believer.
 - iii. Christ's present function is the head of the body; as head He provides the resources to increase and grow by bestowing grace on each member of the church to serve the body.
 - iv. Every individual believer is bestowed with grace from Christ and is called into the ministry.

- v. The responsibility of the pastor is to equip the various members of the body of Christ to minister to one another. The mark of a healthy church is one in which every member is aware of the grace of God and actively serving.
- vi. This passage highlights the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9, Rev. 1:6; 5:10).
- vii. The body of Christ is not a place to sit and soak, but to serve. Every believer is called into full-time Christian ministry. Being a Christian means being a minister.