

Ephesians 4:9-14

Last week, we ended with verse 8, a paraphrase of Psalm 68:18, **Therefore it is said, “When He ascended on high He made captivity itself a captive; He gave gifts to His people.”**

⁹ (When it says, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that He had also descended [first] into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

First, Jesus “descended” to the earth to become the servant and sin-bearer. In doing so, Jesus temporarily gave up some of the prerogatives of Deity. Paul wrote to the Philippians about this in Philippians 2:5-11....

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,⁸ He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

****1.** What stands out most to you in these verses from Philippians?

Jesus’ position now, after the ascension, is far superior to when He was on earth. Prior to the ascension, Jesus could only be in one place at a time. Now He fills the whole universe. After Paul’s brief digression, we come to the matter of spiritual gifts that was mentioned in verse 8. Here are just 4 (or 5) spiritual gifts– there are many more. (As was mentioned last week, spiritual gifts are also listed in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4.)

These particular gifts focus on the structure and nature of the church.

All gifts are necessary...like every player on a football team. You may have a great quarterback and receivers, but if the offensive line is not doing their job, you’re got problems!

Here, Paul focuses on the word or speaking gifts:

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

In a way, these are like the systems of the body:

APOSTLES – these are like the skeletal system (everything begins with this – gives structure).

The Greek word means “someone who has been sent.” These were the “missionaries” who founded churches.

In the New Testament, in addition to the Twelve, Paul and Barnabus (Acts 14:14), James (Jesus’ half-brother; see Galatians 1:19) are called Apostles. In Acts 1, we read that after the death of Judas, the others filled his position with one of the men “*who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us... one of these should become a witness with us of His resurrection.*”

Are there apostles today? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that there are those who are sent out as missionaries, who establish churches and give witness to the resurrection of Christ. No, in the sense that there is no one today who saw Jesus and physically witnessed the resurrected Christ.

PROPHETS – these are like the nervous system (provides communication) This is also a role that began in the Old Testament. Prophets proclaim the Word of God. Remember, their primary function was as “forth-tellers”,

more than “fore-tellers.”

We see a number of people in the New Testament, both men and women, who had the gift of prophecy. Their role was to understand and apply the truth of the Scriptures. Jesus prayed in the “Great High Priestly Prayer” *Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth.* (John 17:17)

EVANGELISTS – This is like the digestive system. (brings things in from outside). The Greek word literally means to “proclaim the Good News” to unbelievers. The only individual specifically called an evangelist in the New Testament is Philip (Acts 2:12; cf. Acts 8:26-40 for Philip’s evangelistic ministry). Though not called an evangelist, Paul urged Timothy to “*do the work of an evangelist*” (2 Timothy 4:5).

PASTORS/TEACHERS – this is like circulatory system (feeds and cleanses the body). People have often argued about whether this is one gift (or office) or two. The Greek context suggests one. (All pastors teach, but not all teachers are necessarily pastors.)

It is imperative that pastors/teachers (and prophets and evangelists) faithfully declare the Word of God in its fullness, not adding, subtracting or changing. As Paul reminded the Ephesians as he took leave of them (Acts 20:27) *I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.*

The purpose of each of these gifts (and every gift in the body of Christ) is never for one’s own glory, but rather...

¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

equip = the word means to perfect, to make ready for use; used as a medical term, to set a bone.

In Matthew 4:21 the word (equip) was used of the fishermen preparing their nets! When the nets were ready, they didn’t survey and take pride in their work, it was time to go fishing! In February, 1941, Winston Churchill gave a speech in which he said, “If you were to ask me what I would say to Mr. Roosevelt, I would say this: ‘Give us the tools, and we will finish the job.’” That’s what happened – the tools were given so that Britain could continue the fight before America entered World War 2.

“Equip the saints” – the saints have to be willing to be equipped!

Notice who is to do the “work of ministry” – not the apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors/teachers..... but the saints!

The King James Version puts a comma after saints, but that changes everything! It would imply that the pastors, teachers, apostles, etc. are to do the work of ministry. But there is no justification for this in the original Greek, nor is it supported by the context.

Ministry, or works of service, comes from the word “diakonos” meaning practical service.

It is where we get our word “deacon”. All believers are called to active Christian service of one sort or another, with the goal being to build up the body, the Church.

****2.** What are some things that have or could equip you in this way?

The goal, or the fruit of the ministry:

¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

**3. What is the unity of faith?

Are there some things that are beyond acceptance for the sake of unity?

Isn't it interesting the unity we feel when we are with other Christians, because we are of the same mind, and have the same God-directed goals.

**4. What is the "knowledge of the Son of God"? What are the most important basics?

It is not something from our own imaginations, nor mere intellectual knowledge, but something deeper than that because it comes from a revelation from God Himself. This is why we can never have too much exposure to the Word of God. The Ephesians had much exposure as the Apostle Paul said to them, *You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.* (Acts 20:20-21) Wouldn't it be great if we could be transported back to attend one of Paul's home Bible studies!

**5. What are some wrong ideas about Jesus that you hear today? Does it make a difference? Why?

Think of a really good friend...how did they become that? Usually over time as you came to know more and more about them. It is hard to become a really close friend without really knowing them!

**6. What is Christian maturity for the individual? How does a church grow to maturity?

Biggest measure of Christian maturity is not more knowledge, but becoming more like Christ as we *let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...* (Colossians 3:16)

The New International Version says: "... *become mature, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ.*" Perfection or "full stature" is the Greek word "teleion," which means to fully become all that one is intended to be.

Alan Glustoff (in a YouTube video) a cheese farmer in Goshen, New York, described his process for aging cheese, a process that adds to a cheese's flavor and texture. Before it can be sent out to market, each block of cheese remains on a shelf in an underground cave for six to twelve months. In this humid environment the cheese is carefully tended. "We do our best to give it the right environment to thrive...and to develop to its truest potential." Glustoff's passion for developing the potential of the cheese he produces is like God's passion for developing the "truest potential" of His children so they will become fruitful and mature. That is the purpose of these spiritual gifts.

Here is one of the practical implications of our maturity:

¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.

In other words, don't be "wishy washy" and believe everything you hear, see or read. (This is the problem of much "social media"!)

It didn't take long for false teaching to appear in the early church. The Apostle Paul wrote words of caution in a number of his letters.

Galatians 1:6-9

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Colossians 2:8-9

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,

1 Timothy 1:3-7

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work — which is by faith.⁵ The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.⁶ Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk.⁷ They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

1 Timothy 6:3-5

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions⁵ and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

****7.** Is this a problem today? What are some of those teachings? What are the subtle things we must watch out for?

As I have said many times, the key to recognizing a counterfeit is to really know the Word of God, and be in relationship with God. Then anything that is false or varies from the truth of Scripture will immediately become apparent.