

Gifts from the Conquering Christ Ephesians 4:8-13

Introduction

⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." ⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

1. Occasion of These Gifts (8-10)

⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."

Therefore—cf Ephesians 4:7

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

It says (quotation)

Psalm 68:18

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.

Receiving gifts speaks of the spoils of war which the conqueror in turn distributed to the people.

Psalm 68 commemorates the Lord's deliverance of his people Israel from Egypt, leading them out during the Exodus and guiding them through the wilderness, giving them the law at Sinai through Moses.

Just as Moses received the Law of God at Sinai and then distributed it to the people, so Christ received the Spirit (the Anointed One) and distributed the Spirit to His people—the new covenant promised God would write His law on their hearts.

Thus, Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2:33

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far

above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

Since Christ's ascension refers to His return to heaven after His victory over sin and death, it is natural to take His descending to the lower regions as reference to the humiliation of His incarnation in coming to earth. That is the way our translators are taking it, rather than as a reference to descending into the grave or to hades.

So what gifts did Christ give to men when He ascended?

He gave the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and through the Spirit He gave spiritual gifts. Those gifts to the church come through persons in the church who are to exercise those gifts.

2. Identity of These Gifts (11)

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

Notice that all these gifts are people. God uses people as the conduits of His gifts throughout the church.

Apostles—sent ones

Prophets—hear from God and speak to humans

Evangelists—gospelizers

Shepherd-teachers—lead, feed, and care for the flock of God by teaching His Word

3. Function of These Gifts (12)

The human conduits of God's Word

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

Equip—to make functional, like fishermen mending nets or a doctor setting a bone

Saints—holy ones because they belong to God

Work of the ministry—the work of serving (deaconing); everyone in the body needs to serve for it to function properly

Building up—edifying vs tearing down, construction vs destruction or demolition

Body of Christ—we are individual members of one body

4. Goal of These Gifts (13)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Until we all attain—not just the individuals, but the entire body growing together

The unity of the faith—the body of truth we must believe/rely on to be Christian; the irreducible gospel

The unity of the knowledge of the Son of God—experiential knowledge of God’s Son

To mature manhood = the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ
Maturity looks like Jesus (self-sacrificing love)

1 John—God’s love perfected in us—love one another

Conclusion

1. Occasion of These Gifts (8-10)
2. Identity of These Gifts (11)
3. Function of These Gifts (12)
4. Goal of These Gifts (13)