

Symphony Devotional Ephesians 4

Hello, everyone. Today's passage comes from Ephesians 4:7-16.

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 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, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

In today's passage, Paul is describing how the gift of spiritual leadership equips and unifies the church. This is an encouragement and exhortation to both the leaders of the church and also to the greater body as to how to maintain unity, and we'll go through the different points that the Apostle Paul makes in this passage.

Firstly, Paul starts off by saying that what he's about to discuss is all from the grace of Christ. And I think this is a very necessary and humbling reminder at the start because the topic that Paul is discussing is spiritual gifting in leadership which could lead to puffing up of the chest and thinking better of oneself. But Paul reminds us that it is a gift of unmerited favor that we did not

deserve, but Christ gave anyway. He says: “But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” Then, the next verse (verse 8) is actually a reference to Psalm 68, that “when he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” And then he explains in this small section in parentheses about what this reference to Psalm 68 means. And in short, he says that Christ’s ascension to the glory of Heaven implies that there was a descension. And this descension shows that God’s plan was always to “fill all things” in Christ, as it says in verse 10, including us in this world who are broken and imperfect.

So, this is how the Apostle Paul starts off this exhortation about leadership: that everything is because of Christ’s grace and that it is His plan to fill us even though we are broken. With that said, Paul then begins to talk about this spiritual gift of leadership. He first says in verse 11 that Christ “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” Christ is the one who gave these positions of spiritual leadership for the church to be led by. We won’t go into each individual position, but the “shepherds and teachers” we see in this verse is actually one position with two descriptors in the Greek; they are not separate roles, but one role with two titles (shepherd-teacher), which is what pastoral leadership is. And these apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherd-teachers are called to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, to mature manhood.”

And I think in general, this is a concept the church today understands fairly well, that our spiritual leaders have this role of equipping the church. But this passage is not only an exhortation to spiritual leaders of the church, but also to the greater body of what it looks like to actually be the church that Christ designed for her to be. And what most stood out to me while reflecting on this passage was the last verse, verse 16: “from whom [referring to Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” I think there are some in the modern church who view spiritual leaders such as pastors, as the ones who do the work for us in our spiritual journeys. At times, there is a spiritual passivity in the body that expects the pastors—the shepherd-teachers—to take us toward spiritual maturation. But the Apostle Paul

seems to be clear here that it is when each part of the body is working properly, when everyone is well-oiled, willing to take action, that is when the body grows to build itself up in love.

I was very humbled and encouraged by this passage today in this reminder from Paul that the growth of the church is two-fold: that the spiritual leaders do well to equip the saints for ministry, and that the greater body in turn does the work of ministry, to make sure to work the way it was designed to, in unity, in speaking truth to one another in love, all under the headship of Christ.

I want to encourage us today to reflect on this exhortation that Paul gives to us as the church. Not as a way of guilt to think we are “underperforming”, but just as an honest self-reflection of how we have been faithful to Christ. If we are leaders in the church, let’s ask God to continue to reveal to us how to equip the body more and more effectively for ministry, for wisdom and discernment in the direction that God calls us to lead. If we are part of the greater body, let’s ask God to move us to become better and better functioning parts of the body, that we would not be comfortable in passivity, but active in our pursuit of the growth of the church. I think this is really the heart behind our changing of the term church member to church partner. Let’s partner together as one body to love one another and glorify Christ.