

**PRACTICING OUR UNITY AS A CHURCH:
DELIGHTING IN OUR VICTORIOUS CHRIST**

Ephesians 4:8-10
Pastor Doug Roman, Bible Baptist Church
Sunday AM, July 25, 2010

This morning we are going to look at a passage that should cause us to delight in our victorious Christ.

Big Idea: Christ's victory on the cross grants Him a place of supremacy in the world, church, and our lives.

The Old Testament Foundation of Christ's Victory: "Therefore it says" (v. 8a)

Notice that Paul begins verse eight with the word "Therefore" (διὸ). The word "it" is a reference to the Scriptures, the OT. The exact same Greek phrase translated "Therefore it says" (διὸ λέγει) is found again in 5:14 where he cites passages from Isaiah. It is also used in James 4:6 where James cites Proverbs 3:34. Paul is connecting dots. He is essentially saying, "I said this, here's the text that supports my assertion." By the way, this is precisely what we need to do: gather our theology from the Bible. The connection between Psalm 68 and Ephesians 4 is the theme of victory.

The Work of our Victorious Christ, "he ascended" and "he gave" (vv. 8b-9)

Vv. 9-10 provides inspired commentary. In this commentary, He applies Psalm 68 to Christ (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 527).

If I said, "I returned to Otsego on Friday." Your mind would work the same way Paul's mind is working here. You're follow up question would reasonably be, "where did you go?" "I returned" implies "I went." So the phrase "Christ ascended" logically follows that Christ descended. John 3:13, "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (cf. 6:32, 68).

Does this text teach the "harrowing of Hell" which states that between Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus went down to Hell, preached to those in Hell, and brought the OT saints with Him (cf. Philippians 2:10 and 1 Peter 3:19-20). It is expressed in "The Apostles Creed" (see #716 in our hymnal): [*Christ*] *suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.* This view was advanced as early as the second century AD and still advocated in contemporary writings (cf. TDNT, 3:640-2; Larkin, *Ephesians*, 76), though it has lost its predominance. This view is prominent in the Catholic Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §633) but also in some Protestant churches. The short answer is no. There are at least four problems with this view:

- First, one has to establish that the Greek word translated "lower parts" (κατώτερος) means Hades (cf. Louw and Nida, §1.18; §83.54; BDAG, 535 only cites options). It is used no fewer than six times in the LXX (Nehemiah 4:13; Psalm 63:9; 86:13; 88:6; 139:15; Lamentations 3:55). This is the only time this word is used in the GNT. If he intended to refer to Hades, he certainly could have used the Greek word for it (ᾗδης), which is commonly used in the Gospels; but he didn't (cf. Eadie, *Ephesians*, 292). Incidentally, even if it does mean Hades, it does not mean some strange underworld. It is a word that means "grave" (TWOT, 2:2303-4). A key question is the author's understanding is Hades as some version of an underworld, or Hades as the grave. The latter is far less objectionable than the former.
- Second, the location of Christ's victory was at the cross not Hell (Colossians 2:15).
- Third, who are the "captives"? Satan? Sin? Death? Demons? Unbelievers? OT Saints? Some combination of these? The "captives" language "refer more naturally to prisoners-of-war from the enemy than to the conqueror's rightful subjects who had been from the enemy leader's unwelcome control" (Bruce, *Ephesians*, 344).
- Fourth, the "cosmology" of Ephesians is always "heaven and earth" (cp. Matthew 11:23; Acts 2:19; cf. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 294).

In cases like this one, we want to employ an important principle of Bible interpretation called "the analogy of faith." Wherever the meaning of a Biblical passage is unclear, we need to refer to places where it is clear. In other words the Bible interprets itself. This principle is helpful in a text like this.

In conclusion, Christ's descent refers to His incarnation and the phrase "the lower regions, the earth" refers to the earth. The phrase, "the earth" identifies "the lower regions." Therefore it is not a reference to some unbiblical notion of an underworld but simply a reference to the earth. The theological accent mark is on the ascension which is what gives

The Supremacy of our Victorious Christ, "that he might fill all things" (v. 10)

The word "that" (ὅτι) provides a stated purpose for the ascension (not both ascent and decent). All this discussion on interpretative questions leads to the culmination and significance of the discussion. It like Christmas time when you break out all the decorations including the Christmas lights that are all tangled up. You spend a lot of time untangling the lights, stringing them out, and placing them just so on the tree. Finally your wife plugs them in and the brilliance of those Christmas lights fill the room and you forget about all the work. So it is here. When we work through all the interpretative tangles the splendor of the supremacy of Christ lights up the page of this text and allows us to be stunned and in awe and consequently we delight in our victorious Christ.

The phrase "he might fill all things" is similar to the terminology used of God the Father in Jeremiah 23:24 (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 6:18). What is the significance of "fill all things?" There is no place that Jesus' authority and name cannot be known. Thus, the risen and ascended Christ has authority to rule over and distribute gifts to His church (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 530, 537; Anders, *Ephesians*, 152).

This is the unifying principle in the body of Christ: the supremacy of Christ gives us cause to delight in our victorious Christ! People come and go, programs come and go, but the Head of the Church remains and this should be the unifying principle in the body of Christ!

Application/Conclusion

- Christ has equipped us to be a victorious church. God has not set-up His church for failure. He has set up Bible Baptist Church to carry out His purposes in our generation.
- Christ has equipped the church to grow you and develop you. God desires you to be the Christian you ought to be. He also wants us to be a church that displays the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ. Let's not live in a defensive, covering posture. Let's labor and live corporately and aggressively and intentionally to win this community to Christ, to plant churches, to have an active saint-equipping ministry, and to have an urgent disciplining and restoring church!
- We are not to live the Christian life outside of a body of believers. We need the encouraging sharpening ministry of others in our lives. God established the church, the living organism in which we worship, pray, serve, and grow.