

The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 4:9-16

Session 31: Descended and Ascended

In our previous session, we were looking at the issue of the spiritual gifts which were given to edify the members of the body of Christ before any written scriptures were available.

Let's continue our study of this issue.

Yes, Paul began to teach the mystery and its attendant doctrines, but in the beginning, it was just Paul. There weren't 12 apostles that got instructed by the Lord Jesus in the mystery; it was just Paul. There were no written scriptures. And now, the message is not just to Israel, but to the world, which was a much larger audience spread out over a much larger area.

So, God in His wisdom, gave the supernatural gifts of the Spirit to men in the assemblies (which were established by Paul and those who were taught by Paul) whereby they would edify the members of those assemblies. Then, by the spiritual gifts, there were apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers who began to preach Paul's gospel and teach Paul's message, but they received it supernaturally from the Spirit.

Ephesians 3:4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) ⁵ Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, **as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;**

Eventually, as Paul writes the inspired books of the Bible, those assemblies would use some of those gifts to identify what was inspired scripture and what was not. Accordingly, they would copy those scriptures, and distribute them to other churches.

As the canon of scripture grows nearer and nearer to completion, the gifts begin to diminish.

Paul writes to the Corinthians about the spiritual gifts just as he does the Ephesians, but you will notice there are some differences. When Paul writes to the Corinthians, he is writing to babes in Christ and believers who are carnal. Many are misusing the gifts and abusing them. So, what Paul writes to them is basic, simple and contains a lot of details in explanation because he is correcting them.

But when Paul writes to the Ephesians, he is writing to adults; mature saints who are not abusing the gifts. His instructions presuppose they know some things.

Plus, the Corinthians were utilizing the gifts at the start of the DoGG, as there were still plenty members of the little flock still around. It is early in the transition time of the book of Acts.

As a result, the list of gifts was much larger as Paul's "to the Jew first" sign gifts were part of the Corinthian list of gifts, while the Ephesian list is limited to the edification gifts.

By the time Paul writes Ephesians, he is in prison and that transition time is coming to a close and the gifts are beginning to slow down and cease to function.

While we will cover this in much more detail in our Corinthians study, I do want to make one more point about this: **The gifts were never meant to be the permanent solution to edification for the BoC.** The edification provided by the spiritual gifts was in part and temporary until the inspired scriptures were given by Paul.

1 Corinthians 12:1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.²⁸ And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.²⁹ *Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles?*³⁰ Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?³¹ But covet earnestly the best gifts: **and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.**

That “more excellent way” is for the word of God to effectually work in us to produce the very character of Christ.

The gifts of 1 Corinthians 12 fall into three categories. Paul says that the three categories of gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 will all eventually go away, but how they go away will depend on which category they are in.

1 Corinthians 13:8 Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, **they shall fail**; whether *there be* tongues, **they shall cease**; whether *there be* knowledge, **it shall vanish away**.

As you can see, some will “fail.” Other will “cease,” while the third group will “vanish away.” The result is the same, the gifts will stop, but the manner of their stoppage is different. We will talk about this more in our Corinthians study.

Next, Paul describes the “in part” nature of the gifts.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.¹⁰ But **when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away**.

When Paul uses the word “perfect” he is using it in the meaning of the following Oxford English Dictionary definition:

I.2.a. – c1350 - Having all the essential characteristics, elements, or qualities; not deficient in any particular; complete, full; total; (of an emotion) unstinted, unreserved.

Paul says that during the time of the gifts we “know in part” and we “prophesy in part.” What does it mean if something is “in part?” It means that the work it is doing is not full, it is not complete, it is not perfect, but it is partial. Paul says something is coming, (“when that which is perfect is come”) which will replace that which is in part; i.e., the gifts. What is that which is perfect? It is the completed revelation of scripture. Again, if you don’t see this, just hang on until we get to this at the Glen Rose study on Tuesdays.

Paul describes the gifts as the things of childhood.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

This is not meant to disparage the gifts, but to demonstrate that they were a “stop-gap” measure until the inspired writings were given. When the word of God was completed, we were given everything we need to grow in grace, to be edified. By the word of God, we can live up to who we have been made to be in Christ.

Just as we no longer speak, understand or think like a child, but we put those things away when we became adults, in the same way the members of the BoC in the early years of the DoGG, needed to prepare to put away the gifts (the things of childhood) and be edified by the effectual working of God’s word (the more excellent way of adulthood).

Of course, there is a lot more to see about this, but we will reserve this for our study in 1 Corinthians on Tuesday nights.

What we want to get out of this is that when Christ was on the Cross, He provided for some things which would not come to fruition until the DoGG; He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. Now we know what those are. We are still seated with Christ far above all principality and powers, and we will never again be subject to the Adversary. And thank God that He, in His wisdom, provided for the spiritual gifts to get the early members of the BoC edified until the more excellent way of God’s word was completed.

Ephesians 4:8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

We covered vs. 8 in the last session, but I wanted to start with it as we read the verses in parenthesis, so we can see the context.

Verse 9 picks up on the “ascended” in vs. 8, and says that since He “ascended,” He must have “descended first into the lower parts of the earth.” This is not teaching that Christ went to hell to suffer for us, so we wouldn’t have to.

Christ suffered for the sins of the world while He was on the cross. And I want to talk about this for a moment. No, Christ did not suffer for eternity. So, how can His suffering be equal to anyone’s suffering? It can because there are degrees of suffering. The Bible says there will be degrees of suffering.

Mark 6:11 And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be **more tolerable** for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

For example, let’s say that you are suffering a “hang nail” for all eternity. That would be tolerable, but you would be suffering for eternity. The issue is the degree of suffering.

Jesus, in those hours on the Cross, when He was bearing the sins of the world, was bearing the full suffering of those sins in a concentrated form. In other words, if the time is shortened, the degree of suffering is increased. Jesus was not just suffering the agonizing physical pain of crucifixion, but was, at the same time, taking upon Himself the sins of the world and the full suffering for every sin.

1 Peter 3:18 For **Christ also hath once suffered for sins**, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

1 Peter 2:24 Who his own self **bare our sins in his own body on the tree**, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Christ did not bear our sins in hell, but while He was on the Cross.

1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for ***the sins of the whole world***.

I think this taking of the sins of the world upon Himself is the “cup” that Jesus prayed could pass from Him as He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane.

Matthew 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, **if it be possible, let this cup pass from me:** nevertheless not as I will, but as thou *wilt*.

Even though crucifixion was an excruciating way to die, I do not believe that Jesus was asking not to die. I think the thing that bothered Him as He faced all this as man, is the concentrated suffering for the sins of the world in a small amount of time.

You understand, as Jesus was bearing the sins of the world, He was doing so as a man, for He was dying for mankind. (Not as an angel for the angelic realm, or any other realm.) And, He was doing this alone. Yes, He is still “God in the flesh” but He is doing this without the Father intervening to help Him.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

My point here is that Jesus took upon Himself the sins of the world, and suffered for all of them in a matter of hours.

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

God did let Jesus off the hook (so to speak) by only having Him suffer for a little while, when people who die in their sin will suffer forever. The difference is the degree of suffering. And knowing that He would have to endure this alone, while hanging on the cross, I think this is the part which made the man Jesus pray like He did in Gethsemane.

Jesus is human, and being faced with his suffering on the cross, His bearing the sins of the world, His enduring the curse of the law, and the wrath of His Father being poured out on Him, whereby His soul was made an offering for sin.

Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief: when **thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin**, he shall see *his* seed, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Christ's human nature, under the insupportable load of what was before him, wishes for another way to provide the redemption, but His spirit immediately prays, "nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done." This does not make Christ inferior to those martyrs who desired death and endured torments, for what they were going through were very different.

Jesus is both God and man. His deity does not cancel out His humanity. He doesn't get a pass on pain or fear any more than we do. He has what we have, the doctrine working in Him. Remember, "he grew in wisdom and stature."

I told you that Jesus did not go to hell to suffer for our sins, He did that on the cross. But, it is true that in Acts 2:27, Peter does quote David in Psalm 16, as saying that Christ, after his death on the Cross, was in hell during the three days and nights between His death and resurrection.

Acts 2:27 Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

The word for "hell" in Acts 2 is the word "hades" which is "the place of the dead." Do not confuse this with "hell fire" or "the lake of fire." Actually, in hell, there were compartments. The compartment for the "saved" dead would be "Abraham's Bosom." But there was also a compartment of torment for the unsaved.

So, to where did Christ descend? We know where His body was, it was in the tomb (the grave). His soul, according to Peter descended into hades (hell). While He was in hades, Christ did something very interesting: according to Peter, Christ "preached" to some spirits which were down there.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: ¹⁹ By which also **he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;** ²⁰ Which sometime were disobedient, when once the

longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

So, who were these “spirits” to whom Christ preached and what did He preach to them? These spirits are the ones who were disobedient “in the days of Noah.” These are the “sons of God” who perished in the flood along with the Nephilim who sought to corrupt the “seed of the woman” to keep Christ from being born into the world. Those spirits are “in prison” even now.

What did Christ preach unto them? In light of what Paul and Peter have written, I think the message was a two-fold message of victory by virtue of the Cross:

- 1) Christ proclaimed His victory (by virtue of the cross) over Satan and all of his realm, over spiritual wickedness in high places (there is the heavens) and over the rulers of the darkness of this world (there is the earth). As such, when He ascended up on high, it was to Father’s right hand far above all principality, power, might, dominion and every name that is named. The saved in both programs benefit from this victory.

So, what was the message? “You guys thought that sending me to the Cross was going to be the end of me, but what you didn’t know is what I accomplished on the Cross was your total ruin and undoing. I wanted you to send me to the Cross. You guys participated in your own destruction and you never saw it coming. You are totally defeated. At my ascension I am going to parade right through your territories in the HP as though I own them. I triumphed because I won the battle on the Cross. I have overcome all of you and I have come down here to tell you that you failed. I have taken you as my captives. As such, you have no more power over those who believe in me. I am about to take my place at the highest position possible, at the right hand of my Father.” He informed them of their defeat.

- 2) Christ proclaimed His victory over death, hell and the grave; i.e., He preached His own resurrection from the dead to the spirits in prison.

What was that message? “Yes, I’m down here right now. But I am here on purpose, not for punishment. Death cannot hold me. In me is life and I am the rightful possessor of heaven and earth; I am the most High. And soon I will

demonstrate it to all the creation for I will rise from the dead and then I will ascend to my Father.”

So, my thinking is that Christ preached his victory over Satan’s realm and His resurrection from the dead. That takes us back to our passage in Ephesians 4.