

IN RESPONSE – EPHESIANS 4:7-11: A STUDY, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

Volume X, Number 3, March, 2001

Our study of Psalm 68:18 now takes us to Ephesians 4:7-11 where Paul quotes the Psalm. As Calvin indicates, “Careful examination of the Psalm will show it to be applied strictly to God alone.”¹ However, Paul clearly applies verse 18 to Christ. Our study centers on this use of the Psalm portion.

“With the fourth chapter begins the second main division of the epistle.”² Thus Paul “passes, as usually in his Epistles, after the doctrinal exposition to practical exhortation....”³ Christians are people “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would *walk* in them” (Ephesians 2:10, italics added). Paul applies this idea in chapters four and following.

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to *walk* in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1). The believer’s calling is that of a “Christian vocation.”⁴ To *walk* in a way that is *worthy* of your calling is to conduct yourself “in harmony with” it.⁵ Paul therefore urges “that you *walk* no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind” (Ephesians 4:17). Rather, you must “*walk* in love, just as Christ also loved you” (Ephesians 5:2). “You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; *walk* as children of Light” (Ephesians 5:8). Take care. “Be careful how you *walk*, not as unwise men but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15, italics added in each quote). This is the big picture.

At the start, how does one walk worthy of his or her calling as a Christian? Paul explains it is “with all humility and

gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance⁶ for one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2). The next “clause is parallel to the preceding....”⁷ It reads, “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Hodge summarizes. “The apostle exhorts his readers to walk worthy of their vocation. Such a walk should be characterized by humility, meekness, long-suffering, and zeal to promote spiritual unity and peace, verses 1-3.”⁸

It is possible, verses 4-16 are “essentially parenthetical, and the line of thought in vv. 1-3 is resumed in v. 17.”⁹ Here Paul divides striving for spiritual unity and peace into two categories.

First, inherent unity already exists. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).¹⁰ “The church is one because it is one body, has one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father who is over, through, and in all its members, verses 4-6.”¹¹ Although this unity may be, in principle, invisible,¹² we *must* express it visibly. This is Paul’s initial point.

“This unity, however, is consistent with great diversity of gifts, which Christ distributes according to his own will, verse 7.”¹³ “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7). “Unity is

not uniformity.”¹⁴ “In oneness of the body, etc., there is room for diversity, and no one is overlooked; each has his own position.”¹⁵ The body is one. However, “the body is not one member but many. In every organism a diversity of parts is necessary to the unity of the whole.”¹⁶ These gifts are necessary, as Paul later instructs, for “the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the *unity* of the faith” (Ephesians 4:12-13, italics added). A diversity of gifts therefore promotes unity. “To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). This brings us to the primary section of interest in our study, verses 7-11.

Gifts are the product of grace. Paul emphasizes each one in the body receives grace and gifts. These gifts are manifestations of the work of the Spirit. “What is given is not the χάρισμα but the *carij*, the subjective grace that works within and shows itself in its result—the *charism*, the gracious faculty or quality.”¹⁷ Hodge puts it this way. “The *grace* here spoken of includes the inward spiritual gift, and the influence, function or office, as the case might be, flowing from it. Some were apostles, some prophets, some evangelists. The *grace* which made them such, was the inward gift and the outward office.”¹⁸ “Moreover, he makes Christ their Author.”¹⁹ Christ is the head of the body. He dispenses grace within His body. “The giver is Christ; he is the source of the spiritual influence conferring power, and the official appointment conferring authority. He, therefore, is God, because [he is] the source of the inward life of the church and of its authority and of its officers. He is sovereign in the distribution of his gifts.”²⁰

‘In Response’ is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 2001 by Dennis Prutow.

¹ John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians*, Trans. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 174.

² *The Expositors Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicolle, ed. 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 3:319.

³ T. K. Abbott, *Epistle to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1964), 104.

⁴ John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1977), 268.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Literally, “put up with, bear with, endure.” F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 15.

⁷ Eadie, 270.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 197.

⁹ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 58.

¹⁰ See my exposition of verses 4-6, “A Heavenly Heptad,” *In Response*, January 2000.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Eadie, 278.

¹³ Hodge.

¹⁴ Eadie, 279.

¹⁵ Abbott, 110.

¹⁶ Hodge, 211.

¹⁷ Expositor’s, 323.

¹⁸ Hodge.

¹⁹ Calvin, 174.

²⁰ Hodge, 212.

IN RESPONSE – EPHESIANS 4:7-11: A STUDY, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

Ephesians 2:8 quotes Psalm 68:18. “Therefore it says, ‘WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.’” These words come “as a confirmation of what Paul has said.”¹ Paul means to reinforce his argument with the reference to the Old Testament. “In proof of His [Christ’s] exhaustless treasury of fullness, the apostle now adverts to a prophetic Psalm (Ps. 68:18).”² The reference “proves those truths—that the ascended Lord confers gifts—various gifts—that men are the recipients, and that these facts had been presented to the faith and hope of the ancient Jewish church.”³

There are two serious difficulties connected with this citation. The first is, that the quotation does not agree with the original. In the Psalms 68:18, the passage is, “Thou hast received gifts among men.” Paul has it, “He gave gifts to man.” . . . Dr. Addison Alexander in his comment on Psalm 68:18 remarks, “To receive gifts on the one hand and bestow gifts on the other are correlative ideas and expressions, so that Paul, in applying this description of a theocratic triumph to the conquests of our Savior, substitutes one of these expressions for the other.” This is perhaps the most natural solution. The divine writers of the New Testament, filled with the same Spirit, which moved the ancient prophets, are not tied to the mere form, but frequently give the general sense of the passages which they quote. A conqueror always distributes the spoils he takes. He receives to give. And, therefore, in depicting the Messiah as a conqueror, it is perfectly immaterial whether it is said, He received gifts, or, He gave gifts. The sense is the same. He is a conqueror

laden with spoils, and able to enrich his followers.⁴

Jerome gives another explanation. Since in the psalm the act had not yet occurred but was promised in the future, the phrase was accordingly *he received*.... At this time of writing, Christ has already made the gift and churches have been established throughout the whole world. Accordingly he is said to have already given to humanity rather than received gifts among humanity.⁵

These interpretations assume correspondence of the Psalm with the work of Christ. As Hodge notes, these interpretations raise another issue. “The second difficulty connected with this quotation is that Psalms 68 is not Messianic. It does not refer to the Messiah, but to the triumphs of God over his enemies. Yet the apostle not only applies it to Christ, but argues to prove that it must refer to him.”⁶

Is it proper for Paul to take a text from the Old Testament that refers to the victories of God and apply that text to Jesus Christ? Is this a real difficulty? Or should we learn from the hermeneutic of Paul, that is, the hermeneutic of the Holy Spirit? Here is the answer of Hodge.

This difficulty finds its solution in three principles which are applicable not only to this, but also to many similar passages. The first is the typical character of the old dispensation. It was a shadow of good things to come. There was not only a striking analogy between the experience of the ancient people of God, in their descent into Egypt, their deliverance from the house of bondage, their journey through the wilderness, and their entrance into Canaan, and the experience of the church, but this analogy was a designed prefiguration—God’s dealings as the head of the ancient theocracy, were typical of his dealings with the church. His de-

living his people, his conquering their enemies, and his enriching his followers with their spoil, were all adumbrations of the higher work of Christ. As the Passover was both commemorative of the deliverance out of Egypt and typical of the redemption effected by Christ; so, many of the descriptions of the works and triumphs of God under the old economy are both historical and prophetic. Thus the Psalm quoted by the apostle is a history of the conquests of God over the enemies of his ancient people, and a prophecy of the conquests of the Messiah.⁷

Psalm 68 is the story of God’s victory march from Sinai to Jerusalem and His enthronement on Zion.⁸ Paul *does* apply the teaching of the Psalm to Christ. As Hodge indicates, there appears to be the connection of type and anti-type.

The second principle applicable to this and similar cases, is the identity of the Logos or Son manifested in the flesh under the new dispensation with the manifested Jehovah of the old economy.⁹ Hence what is said of the one, is properly assumed to be said of the other. Therefore, as Moses says Jehovah led his people through the wilderness, Paul says Christ led them (1 Corinthians 10:4). As Isaiah saw the glory of Jehovah in the temple, John says he saw the glory of Christ (John 12:41). As it is written in the prophets, “As I live, saith Jehovah, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God,” (Isaiah 45:23), Paul says, this proves that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10, 11).... On the same principle what is said in Psalm 68:18, of Jehovah as ascending to heaven and leading captivity captive, is here said to refer to Christ.¹⁰

‘In Response’ is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 2001 by Dennis Prutow.

¹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931), 4:536.

² E. K. Simpson, F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles of the Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 91-92.

³ Eadie, 281.

⁴ Hodge, 215-216.

⁵ *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Mark J. Edwards, ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 163-164.

⁶ Hodge, 216.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 216-217.

⁸ *In Response*, “Psalm 68:1-18,” February 2000.

⁹ See *In Response*, “Jesus is Jehovah,” September 1998 and July 1999.

¹⁰ Hodge, 217-218. Parentheses added.

IN RESPONSE – EPHESIANS 4:7-11: A STUDY, PART THREE

by Dennis Prutow

There is still a third principle to be taken into consideration. Many of the historical and prophetic descriptions of the Old Testament are not exhausted by any one application or fulfillment. The promise that Japheth should dwell in the tents of Shem, was fulfilled every time the descendants of the former were made to share in the blessings temporal or spiritual of the latter. The predictions of Isaiah of the redemption of Israel were not exhausted by the deliverance of the people of God from the Babylonish captivity, but had a direct reference to the higher redemption to be effected by Christ. The glowing descriptions of the blessings consequent on the advent of the Messiah, relate not merely to the consequences of his first advent, but to all that is to follow his coming the second time without sin unto salvation. The prediction that every knee shall bow to God and every tongue confess to him, is a prediction not only of the universal prevalence of the true religion; but also, as the apostle teaches, of a general judgment at the last day. In like manner, what the Old Testament says of Jehovah descending and ascending, of his conquering his enemies and enriching his people, is not exhausted by his figurative descending to manifest his power, nor by such conspicuous theophanies as occurred on Sinai and in the Temple, or in the triumphs recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, but refer also to his personal advent in the flesh, to his ascension and his spiritual triumphs. It is, therefore, in perfect accordance with the whole analogy of Scripture, that the apostle applies what is said of Jehovah in Psalms 68 as a conqueror, to the work of the Lord Jesus, who, as God manifested in the flesh, ascended on high leading captivity captive and giving gifts unto men.¹

How is it that Paul may apply Psalm 68 to Jesus Christ and His conquests?

Our position is, that the same God is revealed as Redeemer both under the

Old and New Testament, that the Jehovah of the one is the Jesus of the other, that Psalm lxviii. Is filled with imagery which was naturally based on incidents in the Jewish history, and that the inspired poet, while describing the interposition of Jehovah, has used language which was fully realized only in the victory and exaltation of Christ.²

These are possible hermeneutical consideration behind Paul's use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8.

Paul proceeds to give interpretation to the Psalm and to apply it. Ephesians 4:9-10, "Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things."

The One who ascended also first descended. "In the Psalm it was Jehovah that ascended, but that was only after He had first descended to earth to in behalf of His people from his proper habitation in heaven."³ The reference now is to the "Incarnation."⁴ "It was Christ who descended, and therefore, it was Christ who ascended."⁵ "This is simply another way of saying that Christ's exaltation resulted from his humiliation."⁶ Paul gives the picture in Philippians 2: 7-9. Christ "emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." He *descended*. "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name." He *ascended*.

Paul says Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth." The phrase *of the earth* is a "genitive of apposition."⁷ "For this reason it seems preferable to

take 'the lower parts of the earth' as = 'this lower earth.'"⁸ In comparison to that which is "far above all the heavens," this fallen world is a lowly domain. It is a realm where the Son of God was murdered, "nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men" (Acts 2:23). Paul refers to the devil as "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). This is also where "your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Paul therefore refers to Christ's "descent into this sublunary arena of conflict to wage battle against the usurping archenemy."⁹ Calvin also rightly says, "A comparison is drawn, not between one part of the earth and another, but between the whole earth and heaven; as if he had said, 'From that lofty habitation He descended into our deep gulf.'"¹⁰

Once again, we must realize that from this deep gulf Christ "ascended far above all the heavens." The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way. "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation" (Hebrews 9:11). "Above all heavens plainly means above the whole universe; above all that is created visible and invisible; above thrones, principalities, and powers. All things, all created things, are subject to the ascended redeemer."¹¹ Christ ascended outside, above, and beyond this creation. He rules and reigns.

Finally, Christ fills all things. "He was exalted in order that He might take kingly sway, fill the universe with His activity as its Sovereign and Governor, and His Church with His presence as its Head, and provide His people with all needful grace and gifts."¹² More must be said about this grace and these gifts.

'In Response' is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 2001 by Dennis Prutow. You may reproduce articles for church school classes.

² Eadie, 286.

³ Expositor's, 326.

⁴ Robertson, 536.

⁵ Hodge, 219.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 192.

⁷ Robertson; Hodge, 221.

⁸ Abbott, 115.

⁹ Simpson, 92.

¹⁰ Calvin, 176.

¹¹ Hodge.

¹² Expositor's, 328.

¹ Hodge, 218-219.

IN RESPONSE – EPHESIANS 4:7-11: A STUDY, PART FOUR

by Dennis Prutow

Ephesians 4:11 brings us to a portion of the gifts about which Paul is concerned. “And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.” These gifts are individuals given to the church for service. They are taken and given from among those whom Christ takes captive. As Psalm 68:18 indicates of God and of Christ, “You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men.” As the apostle words and applies, “He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.”

“Captivity” is a collective noun for captive enemies; and so he simply means that God reduced His enemies to subjection; which was more fully accomplished in Christ than in any other way. He has not only overthrown Satan, and sin, and death, and all hell, but out of rebels He makes for himself every day an obedient people....¹ This is the grace of God and of Christ. “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Ephesians 4:7).

This grace is abundant. This grace is multifaceted. Peter makes a similar comment. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). Manifold means “variegated, many colored.”² The grace of God does not express itself in a few gifts but in many. It is many-faceted. Each one has received a gift. Each one has a gift. “The Lord’s Anointed has taken captivity captive that He may confer gifts on men.”³

But gifted persons are also gifts to the body. And the body grows as each uses his or her gifts. “The proper working of each individual part causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). Some of those gifted persons Christ sets aside for more formal service. “And He gave some....” “He led a host of captives in his train, and these unlike earthly conquerors, he num-

bered among his own people and enriched and used them. Their presence implies the conquest of his enemies, and far more, for he made those whom he conquered his ministers to men.⁴

Apostles and prophets are, beyond doubt, ministers that are the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). The pastor and teacher is one office that is perpetual, abiding, and permanent. From the grammar we learn “the apostle intended to designate the same persons as at once pastors and teachers.”⁵ The evangelist is variously treated as either a temporary or permanent gift to the church aligned either with apostles and prophets or with pastors and teachers respectively. It is not my intent to discuss these gifts to the church except to notice that they are given by Christ, the exalted reigning King.

What do we learn from our studies of Psalm 68:1-18 and Ephesians 4:7-11. Paul, and hence the Holy Spirit, “identifies the subject of the Psalm with Christ; as elsewhere the Jehovah of the Prophets and Psalms is identified with the Christ of the Apostles, and what is affirmed of the former in the OT is ascribed of the latter in the NT.”⁶ We learn that when we sing from Psalm 68, we sing of the victories of Jesus Christ our Lord leading to His ascension to the right hand of the Father. We learn that to preach from Psalm 68, we preach the victories of Christ. We preach the Gospel of His death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly reign.

Christ enters the field of combat with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Adam failed. Israel failed. Christ, however, keeps covenant with the Father. He does so on behalf of His people.⁷ Christ then goes into mortal combat against the powers of death on the cross. He is victorious in resurrection. “Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of

death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Hebrews 2:14-15). Colossians 2:15 adds, “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through it [that is, the cross].”⁸

The cross is not the end. Christ “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead” (Romans 1:4). Psalm 2:7 predicts the event. “I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” Acts 13:33 confirms this. “God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘You are My Son; today have begotten You.’”

In His victory over death Christ takes a host of captives. These are a people the Father promises to His Son. “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the *nations* as Your inheritance, and the very *ends of the earth* as Your possession” (Psalm 2:8, italics added). Christ commissions His gifts to the church. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the *nations*” (Matthew 28:19, italics added).

He then ascended to heaven where “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). From this position of authority and power He pours forth the Spirit. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to *the remotest part of the earth*” (Acts 1:8, italics added). From this exalted position Christ continues to take captives and will do so “until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). He continues to give good gifts to His church.

Psalm 68 prefigures all this. The Holy Spirit applies the Psalm in this way. When we sing Psalm 68, we sing about the victories of Christ. When we preach from Psalm 68, we preach Christ. We preach the Good News of His death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly reign.

‘In Response’ is published by the Sterling Pulpit, Post Office Box 303, Sterling, KS 67579-0303. Copyright © 2001 by Dennis Prutow.

⁸ New American Standard margin.

⁴ Wescott, 60.

⁵ Hodge, 226.

⁶ Expositor’s, 329.

⁷ See, “Christ our Covenant Keeper,” In Response, July 2000.

¹ Calvin, 175.

² Robertson, 6:125.

³ Simpson, 94.