

Ephesians 4:7-10

We have arrived at an (in)famous passage of Scripture! Today's text is most likely the most disputed amongst commentators and Bible students in the entire book of Ephesians. The reason for the discrepancy and the cause of the confusion will be plain enough as we study but I don't want the issues to skew the very clear, larger teaching of the passage of Scripture.

1. The context
 - a. Recall that Paul has just spoken to the Ephesians about unity
 - b. The entire purpose of the list he provides in v. 4-6 is to demonstrate that the church is united in the faith "once and for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3)
 - c. The church could experience unity precisely because there is one head, one Savior, one Lord, one confession and so forth and this truth supersedes any superficial differences that might otherwise divide (cultural background, preference, etc.)
2. The place for diversity
 - a. Paul's teaching here is not a refutation of what he has just said, but it is a balance
 - b. The point that he is making is that while we are unified in the truth and all belong to one body, we are diverse in our gifts and functions within the unified body
 - c. As John MacArthur once said, "we are unified and we are unique"
3. The means of our diverse gifts
 - a. Notice that Paul says that these gifts were given "by grace"
 - b. The way that grace was given to us is through Christ's descent and ascent
 - i. We will get into the specifics of what that might mean in just a moment but don't let the particulars skew the clear point that is being made which is that God gives grace through Christ's work
 - ii. If you are a believer today, you are indwelt by the Spirit and given grace in gifts that are to be used for the glory of God in cooperation with the body of Christ (see Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12)
 - iii. This means that God's design is for us to function as "one" (recall last week's lesson) as we all lean into our unique gifts
 1. Just as your body is "one" in the sense that it all fits together but comprised of many unique parts (organs, appendages, etc.), so the body of Christ is one in the sense that it all organizes under our head (Jesus) but it is comprised of many unique parts in all of her members
 2. This is by God's design!
 - c. The application here is simple... if you and I are saved by God, we are given gifts that are uniquely entrusted to us to use for His glory and the good of our fellow man

- d. We should celebrate this diversity and lean into it!
 - i. I need men and women who are gifted to serve the mission of our body who are not like me at all
 - ii. In fact, this body would suffer greatly if everyone had the same gifts I have and nobody had the gifts I do not have!
 - iii. The wisdom of God is manifest in His bringing so many different pieces together
- 4. The exegetical challenges *****BE CAREFUL HOW MUCH YOU DWELL ON THIS*****
 - a. There are a few things that catch the eye of the Bible reader and teacher in this passage
 - b. The biggest one revolves around the question of what does it mean that he descended into the lower regions of the earth and who are the captives?
 - i. The question of descent has a few potential answers:
 - 1. Several early church fathers thought that it meant that Christ descended into hades (the realm of the dead)
 - a. They cite 1 Peter 3:19 as evidence
 - b. The problem I have with this interpretation is that I see no evidence that any reference to hades or hell in this passage
 - c. Its possible, I wouldn't think it probable
 - 2. Other commentators (Charles Hodge, John Stott, John Calvin) teach that the descent into the lower parts of the earth is a reference to Christ's incarnation
 - 3. Some even take it to mean that He descended not just physically but even to the point of humiliation (see Philippians 2:5-11)
 - a. I would favor those interpretations in light of the context
 - b. I do not believe that Paul is talking here about some triumph in another realm as much as he is talking about the glory of God in saving the people of God who were then living!
 - c. This salvation of the Ephesians did not take place in the realm of Hades, instead Jesus died so that they could live in the moment!
 - c. Regardless of where you land, let's not make the mistake of speculating on particulars while we miss the thrust of the passage which is clearly that Christ has given us grace to uniquely serve Him as we are unified under His Lordship!