

22.04.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Gifts and Goal of Love

Bible Readings = Eph. 4:7-16 and 1 Cor. 12:27-13:13.

Introduction:

- (1) Last Sunday, we considered the fact that the church is one, but that it lives in two ages. It lives in the current age which is passing away, and yet it belongs wholly to the age to come, and has already the deposit of that resurrection age within it.
- (2) The Church is in the world but it does not belong to this world. Indeed, the world (in the theological meaning that that word) hates the Church because it shares in the life of the Father and the Son, whom it crucified.
- (3) But Christ has been raised up as Lord of the world and its principalities and powers. His aim is to fill the creation with the fullness that he himself knows from the Father. This is through his Church, which is the fullness of him who fills all things.
 - a. Here we can possibly see an echo of the creation accounts, where God filled the emptiness and brought order to the chaos. Christ, as the head of the new creation, is filling the emptiness (where sin 'fills' with hatred, bitterness, greed, etc.) and bringing order the chaos of the sinful and idolatrous forms of this world's life.
- (4) Being filled to the fullness of God by his Spirit is not a luxury for the people of God, but the necessity and the normality!
- (5) How does he accomplish his task and to what end?

This week we hope to see the rich diversity of the ministry gifts Christ has given to his Church, and even more, to see the aim and goal of all gifts: the building up of the body in love for the sake of the world.

1. The Ascended Jesus

- (1) No ascension? Take the heart out of Ephesians.
 - The reality of the ascension is the context in which the whole of Ephesians is to be read. Not just the physical ascension of the body of Jesus, but the spiritual ascension of his people in him.
 - See Eph. 1:3, 20; 2:6-8; 3:10; 6:12; and here, in Ephesians 4:7-10.
- (2) This means that the theological foundation of the letter is the continuing work of Jesus, as in Acts 1:1.
 - That continuing work is based on the completed work of his 'descension' (as in Eph. 4:9). The one who has ascended to the right hand of the Father, is the one who has made purification for sins (Heb. 1:1-4).
 - Thus is current action of filling all things is built on his own emptying: in pouring himself out to death, even death on the Cross, he disarmed the principalities and powers by taking away the guilt of sin.

2. The Action of the Ascended Jesus

- (1) Wider afield in the New Testament the action of the ascension is linked with Jesus' ongoing intercession on behalf of his people (as in Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 8:1-2; 9:24; 1 John 2:1 cf. Acts 7:56-60; 1 Pet. 3:22).

- This is not so much ‘pleading the blood’ at the right hand of the Father, but intervening for us when there is no one to save. He is protecting from the enemies of the Church, leading his people through the last great enemy of death, and so on.
- Being linked with the idea of ‘first fruits’ his resurrection and ascension is also the guarantee of ours.
- It is also a sign of his utter Lordship of all things (as in Eph. 1:20f.), and thus as a secure guarantee that he is not only the foundation stone of the Church, but her living Head.

(2) From this place of action (the heavenly sanctuary) he acts on behalf of Church by giving gifts to men and women.

- The quote in Eph. 4:8 is taken from Ps. 68:18. The whole Psalm is a celebration of the Lord’s victory and the power of his presence. It begins ‘let God arise and his enemies be scattered’ and speaks of his Lordship over the creation itself and kings of the earth, but the Lord who does this is the one who daily bears our burdens (Ps. 68:19). In other words, the presence to God’s people is salvation, which is at the same time judgement on his enemies.
 - However, Ps. 68 is a Psalm which exalts the Lord among the nations. The full quote from Ps. 68:18 runs You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there or is in the NJB You have climbed the heights, taken captives, you have taken men as tribute, even rebels that Yahweh God might have a dwelling-place This may then be compared with Ps. 68:32: O kingdoms of the earth, sing to God; sing praises to the Lord i.e. the power which he grants from his sanctuary is for the subduing of the nations.

(3) These gifts are in the form of ministry gifts, as in Eph. 4:11. These are all ‘word’ gifts to the church, with various functions.

- All ministries which proclaim the ‘descension’ of Christ. They all arise from the Cross, resurrection, ascension ministry of Jesus, the Lamb of God.
- This word of the Cross brings fullness to all the other gifts of ministry, as seen listed in places such as 1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; 1 Pet 4; etc.

(4) The goal of the gifts is the obedience of the nations (Rom. 1:5; 15:14ff.; 16:25ff.), and thus we see the action of the Lord, the Spirit in Antioch, a church replete with these word gifts, as being for the nations (Acts 13:1ff.).

3. The Goal of the Gifting

(1) The goal of the gifting is really that the prayer of Eph. 3:14-16 may be answered! Compare this passage with Eph. 4:12-16.

(2) The ‘love’ here spoken of is the fullness that the Father has for humanity. To be filled with his love is to be filled. The nations are not filled with this, but rather, are opposed to him (Ps. 2 cf. Rom. 1:18ff.)

(3) So the body builds itself up in love by

- Hearing the word of the gospel i.e. devoting itself to that word (as in Acts 2:42)
- ‘Truthing’ things in love: the verb is unusual. Not ‘speaking’ with a modifying adverb, but ‘truthing’... As in NET But practicing the truth in love, we will in all things

grow up into Christ, who is the head NJB If we live by the truth and in love, we shall grow completely into Christ, who is the head

- This means dealing with ourselves and one another on the basis of the Truth as it is in Jesus. The gospel keeps us stable, and pushes us on to maturity.
- Uses all the gifts and operations it has for the sake of the members of the body. All aligned, and all moving in one direction.
 - This is going to mean putting aside things...being renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph. 4:23), putting aside anger etc. (4:25ff)...and putting aside all impurity from our speech and relationships (5:2ff.).

(4) But can we see the glorious truth of Jesus' continuing ministry and Lordship among us, even this day? These are all gifts of love, for love, for the sake of the nations.