

Jim's Notes
November 28, 2007
The Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians
Ephesians 4:7 - 14

Ephesians 4:7

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

In counseling humility, meekness, etc., he sets forth the reason why each person is called to patience and forbearance. Grace has been given to each of us according to the measure in which Christ grants it. Since therefore different people have different gifts, there is no cause for envy or refusal. One should not grieve over what another has, nor should any refuse to give what grace he has received. If therefore Christ grants according to the measure of the grace given to each, we should all embrace one another in love, bearing everything with forbearance and patience, with meekness and humility. (Epistle to the Ephesians 1.4.7)

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

With the Ephesians as with the Corinthians and many others, this subject has been a constant temptation to arrogance, despondency or envy. For this reason he uses the simile of the body everywhere. . . . Pay attention to what he says. He does not say "according to each one's faith," so that he may not induce despondency in those who have not received the great gifts. Rather what does he say? "According to the treasure of Christ's gift," "The truly capital, things" he says, "are common to all: baptism, salvation by faith, having God as Father and partaking of the same Spirit. If someone has more in grace, feel, no resentment, for his task is greater too," . . . What does "according to the measure" mean? It does not mean according to our own merit, for if so then no one would have received what he has received. But of his gift we have all received. Why has one received more, another less? This, he says, means nothing, but it is a matter of indifference, since each person contributes to the work of upbuilding. (Homily on Ephesians 11.4.4-7)

Ephesians 4:8

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

We believers in Christ, having been gathered from the Gentiles, had been taken captive by the devil, though we were creatures of God. We were sold out to the demonic powers. Into this circumstance our Lord Jesus Christ came bearing the baggage of captivity, as Ezekiel says (Ezekiel 12:2-7), and, covering his head so that his adversaries would not know him (Ezekiel 12:6-7), preaching remission to those who had been taken captive and release to those held in chains. . . . After Christ freed us, we were snatched out of an old captivity into a new freeing captivity [to Christ], as he led us with him into heaven. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.8)

It was a nice touch for Paul to write here that Christ gave gifts to humanity, when what is written in Psalm 68 is that “he received gifts among humanity” (Psalm 68:18). Why this difference? Since in the psalm the act had not yet occurred but was promised in the future, the phrase was accordingly “he received.” But the apostle is seeing this as a promise earlier given and later fulfilled. 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. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.8)

Ephesians 4:9

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

Do not suppose when you hear this that he has changed the subject. For his design here is just the same as in the epistle to the Philippians. When he was exhorting them there to be humble he showed them Christ (Philippians 2:7-11). So he does also here too, showing that even Christ descended to the lowest parts of the earth.

The “lower parts of the earth” here means death, by a human metaphor. . . And why does he mention this region here? What sort of captivity is he speaking of? That of the devil. He has taken captive the tyrant, the devil and death, the curse and sin. (Homily on Ephesians 11.4.9-10).

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

The truth incarnate is that he is said to have descended in order to ascend, unlike humans, who have descended in order to remain there. For by decree they were held in the lower world. But this decree could not hold the Savior. He has conquered sin. Therefore, after his triumph over the devil, he descended to the heart of the world, so that he might preach to the dead, that all who desired him might be set free. It was necessary for him to ascend. He had descended to trample death underfoot by the force of his own power, then only to rise again with the former captives. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.9)

Ephesians 4:10a

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Could he possibly have passed through and beyond all the heavens and all the supernal regions and the heavenly orbits which philosophers call the spheres to take his place in the highest heaven, in its topmost location? Or should we rather believe that, transcending and spurning everything corporeal and contemplating the eternal, he has taken his place “above” the heavens, that is, above all that is visible? I think this the better opinion. Therefore the Son of God descended to the lower parts of the earth and ascended above all the heavens, so that he might fulfill not only the Law and the Prophets but also certain hidden dispensations which only the Father knew. He also

descended to the lower parts and ascended to heaven, so that he might bring fulfillment to those who were in those regions, so far as they were able to receive. From this we know that before Christ descended and ascended everything was void and in need of his fullness. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.10)

Ephesians 4:10b

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

Nothing in the cosmos is left untouched by Christ. He indeed descended to the lower parts of the earth and ascended above all the heavens. What heavens? Some say three, some more (see II Corinthians 12:1-2) . . . but what does it matter? Christ, who ascended, ascended above all the heavens, however many. For eternity is now presently reigning in heaven and incorruptible life. All things there live by the Spirit. This reordering did not occur, however, until the descent of Christ. Once the mystery [of the cross] had been accomplished, all these received salvation after the passion and ascent of Christ and have been perfected. For this is what he means by adding “so that he might fulfill all,” that is, make them perfect and full, with nothing lacking. . . . Surely this could not be understood to infer that he fulfilled his mission on earth but set nothing right in the heavens and perfected nothing there. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.10)

Ephesians 4:11a

Caius Marius Victorinus (AD 300 – aft. 362):

The name “prophets” is given to those who, having received the Spirit of God, spoke beforehand of Christ and his advent. These were the prophets who “were until Christ” (see Matthew 11:13). But after he arrived, was there no reason for any further prophecy? What prophets does Paul speak of here? It is obviously those who being full of the Spirit spoke of God after his coming, continuing to expound the divine teaching.

There are five ways of speaking about the Scriptures: speaking in tongues, speaking in revelation, speaking in knowledge, speaking in prophecy, speaking in teaching. . . . But there is another thing apart from these. It is being an evangelist. This means to relate what Christ did and announce that Christ himself is to be worshiped. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.11-12)

Didymus of Alexandria [the Blind] (AD 313 – 398):

This is a house set up and ordered by Jesus. . . . He does not do this in a casual manner. It is with the utmost discrimination and discretion: One is assigned to the rank of an apostle, one to the place of a prophet, others to look after the flock of Christ and to work at the divine instruction of others for those saints who are prepared to learn.

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

“First apostles,” because these had all the gifts. “Then prophets,” for there were some who were not apostles but were prophets, like Agabus. “Third, evangelists, “those who

did not travel everywhere but merely preached the gospel, like Priscilla and Aquila. "Shepherds and teachers" means all those in positions of trust. Are these shepherds and teachers of less account? Certainly it seems that those who are stationary and reside in a single place, like Timothy and Titus, [are of less account] than those who go about the world preaching the gospel. But on another reading we cannot from this passage deduce subordination and precedence but from a different letter. (Homily on the Ephesians 11.4.11-12)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

"Apostles" are bishops, while "prophets" are interpreters of the Scriptures. . . . Even if they are not elders they can nonetheless preach the gospel without a chair, as Stephen and Philip are recorded to have done. "Shepherds" may be readers, who nourish the people who hear them by their readings. . . . "Masters" may refer to the healers in the church who constrain and chastise those who are troubled. Or they may be those who were accustomed to hearing the readings and imparting them to children, as was the Jewish custom. Their tradition was passed on to us but has by now become obsolete through neglect. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.12.1-2)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

From this passage Paul clearly confirms the divinity of the Father and Son. What Christ is here said to have bestowed [as in his first letter to the Corinthians] is nothing less than the gift of God (see I Corinthians 12:28) . . . Failing to understand this, Sabellius confused the Father and the Son, not grasping that, though distinguishable, they work together with single intent. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.11-12)

Ephesians 4:11b

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

It is not to be supposed that as with the first three . . . he has allotted different offices to shepherds and teachers. For he does not say "some shepherds, some teachers" but "some shepherds and teachers," meaning that he who is a shepherd should at the same time be a teacher. No one in the church, even saintly person, should take to himself the name of shepherd unless he can teach those whom he feeds. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.11-12)

Ephesians 4:12

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

He says that the church's order has been so formed as to join the human race together in the profession of unity, so that all may be in Christ, having Christ as their single head, that is, as the source of life. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.12.6)

Ephesians 4:13a

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

We must ask: Who are the all whom he speaks of as “coming together in the unity of faith?” Does he mean all the people of God or all saints? Or rather all who are capable of reason? He seems to me to be speaking of all the people of God because there are so “many winds of doctrine” blowing about them. When these blasts and billows are aroused, people in general are carried here and there by diverse errors, uncertain of their course. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.13)

Theodoret (AD 392 – 457):

In the future Life we shall attain perfection. But in the present life we need all the help we can get from the apostles, the prophets and our teachers. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.13)

Ephesians 4:13b

St. John Chrysostom (AD 349 – 407):

By “maturity” he means here the perfecting of conscience. For a grown man stands firm while young boys’ wits are tossed about. So it is with the faithful. We mature until we attain the unity of the faith, that is, until we are all found to share a single faith. For this is unity of faith when we are all one, when we all alike acknowledge our common bond. Until then we must labor. If you have received the gift of upbuilding others, be sure that you do not overthrow yourself by envying someone else’s gift. (Homily on Ephesians 11.4.13)

Ambrosiaster [pseudo-Ambrose] (about A.D. 370):

He exhorts them to strive to attain to the perfecting of faith, the essence of which is to hold fast to Christ as true and perfect God. Do not measure him by some human measure. Measure yourself by regarding him as perfect God in the fullness of his deity. When he refers to a “mature man” he does not mean a span of years or physical stature but a maturation into the full understanding of the divinity of the Son of God. (Epistle to the Ephesians 4.13)

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

According to the traditions of the church and the apostle Paul, our resurrection will “be into a mature man and the stature of the fullness of Christ.” This is the state in which the Jews claim that Adam was created and in which we have read that the Lord rose. (Letter 108.25.3-4)

Ephesians 4:14

St. Jerome (AD 347 – 420):

Was Paul referring to himself as one who was tossed to and fro and drifting? According to one view, he was saying this in humility, aware that we see in part and know in part (I Corinthians 13:9). He is aware of how far he is from perfect knowledge and bursts into an expression of his own awareness. If so, anyone who might think himself to be humble should look to Paul as an example (see I Corinthians 13:11). . . . But another will respond to this that, by comparison with the majority, the apostle had already reached “mature manhood,” even though he still might be here regarded as an infant in relation to those eternal blessings that are stored up for the saints. . . . The exposition must proceed very carefully after this to meet the possible claim that the apostle really is speaking in humility when he prays that “we may no longer be children, drifting and carried away in different directions by every blast of doctrine”. . . . Maybe it is out of good conscience and not some false humility that Paul is confessing his own limitations. For he was a man of acute and sharp intellect. . . . He could see that there was often in the manner of speaking on both sides some distorted motives, such that there seemed to be so much truth in contrary assertions as to cause doubt in the listener. Thus, as a human being and still in his fragile little body, he was at times carried about by every wind of doctrine, though he was not cast against the rocks. (Epistle to the Ephesians 2.4.13)