



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

- March 23rd(Baptism), 30th
- April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

The Goal of Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

- **REDEMPTION 1:7** (Salvation, Restoration)
- **DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14** (God's plan for us)
- **GRACE 1:2** (God's favor that we never can earn)
- **PREDESTINATION 1:4-5** [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]
- **RECONCILIATION 2:1-21**
- **UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21**

Week 1: Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

Week 2: Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

Week 3: Understanding JC Headship of the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

Week 4: His Genesis – Predestination, What happened before Genesis and how it affects us today

Week 5: Ephesians 2:11-22 Being One – Not Two

Week 6: Paul's life with God.

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm (Intercession)

Week 8: Angelology

Week 9: Ephesians 3 – Intercession

Week 10: Equation for Unity = Humility + Gentleness + Patience + Forbearing + Love

Week 11:

TOPICS: Conflict (plain unafraid talk 4) Controlling the tongue (4). Sanctification (4). Boundaries/Necessary Endings (5), Sexual impurity/Covetous (5). Submission (5). Husband/Wives (5). Children and Parents (6), Armor of God (6). Reciprocity. FAMILY MATTERS.

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

For this reason I, Paul, ^(A)a prisoner of Christ Jesus ^(B)on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of ^(C)the stewardship of ^(D)God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ ^(E)how the mystery was made known to me ^(F)by revelation, ^(G)as I have written briefly. ⁴ ^(H)When you read this, you can perceive my insight into ^(I)the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is ^(J)that the Gentiles are ^(K)fellow heirs, ^(L)members of the same body, and ^(M)partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ ^(N)Of this gospel I was made ^(O)a minister according to the gift of ^(P)God's grace, which was given me ^(Q)by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, ^(R)though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, ^(S)to preach to the Gentiles the ^(T)unsearchable ^(U)riches of Christ, ⁹ and ^(V)to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery ^(W)hidden for ages in ^(X)God, ^(Y)who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold ^(Z)wisdom of God ^(AA)might now be made known to ^(AB)the rulers and authorities ^(AC)in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was ^(AD)according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have ^(AE)boldness and ^(AF)access with ^(AG)confidence through our ^(AH)faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering ^(AI)for you, ^(AJ)which is your glory.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the ^(AK)Father ^(AL)of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, ^(AM)according to the riches of His glory, ^(AN)to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in ^(AO)the inner man, ¹⁷ ^(AP)that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, ^(AQ)being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ ^(AR)may be able to comprehend with all the saints ^(AS)what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled ^(AT)with all the fullness of God.

[one sentence]

²⁰ Now ^(AU)to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly ^(AV)above all that we ask or think, ^(AW)according to the power that works in us, ²¹ ^(AX)to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Unity in the Body of Christ ESV (Unity and Diversity in the Body. Walk in Unity)

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you [I BEG YOU] to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:7-16

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.⁸ Therefore it says,

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men[& women].”*

9 (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth[lower parts of the earth]? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers], ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The New Life

17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Philippians 2:5-9 ESV

*5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has **highly exalted** Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name,*



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Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Ephesians 4:7-16

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

⁸ Therefore it says,

*“When He ascended on high He led a host of captives,
and He gave gifts to men .”*

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower regions, the earth ? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

¹¹ And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers], ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Section I: The Victory

A. Ephesians 4:8

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- Is Paul quoting [A challenging chapter to completely interpret]:

Psalm 68:18

*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.*

NOTE #1: The procession extends over a vast geographical surface, from Egypt through Sinai and enigmatic Zalmon to Bashan, the northern mountains of the Transjordan (vv. 14–15; mentioned again in v. 22). The overall impression is of a triumphal parade which culminates on Zion. The detail of taking captives is found only here in the biblical text (v. 18).¹

¹ Schaefer, K. (2001). *Psalms* (D. W. Cotter, J. T. Walsh, & C. Franke, Eds.; p. 164). The Liturgical Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

NOTE #2:

The prayer and hopeful praise (vv. 1–6) receive greater intensity as the community reflects on the Lord’s past acts in behalf of Israel.

- They reflect on the wilderness experience, when God went ahead of his people (v. 7; see the allusion to the ark of the covenant in v. 1).
- They thank the Lord for having guided them through the wilderness into Canaan (vv. 7–10), given them the land of promise (vv. 11–14), and made his abode on Mount Zion (vv. 15–18).
- The thanksgiving encompasses several major moments of the history of redemption: (1) the exodus, wilderness wandering, events at Mount Sinai, and settlement (vv. 7–10); (2) the conquest (vv. 11–14); and (3) the establishment of theocracy in Jerusalem (vv. 15–18);²

Is it - Receiving or Giving?

- **Psalm 68:1** *God shall arise, His enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate Him shall flee before Him!*
- God dwells on high = Mount Sinai (**68:8**)
- **Psalm 68:16** *Why do you look with hatred, O many-peaked mountain, at the mount that God desired for His abode, yes, where the Lord will dwell forever?*
- Wanting to be on Mount Zion, His holy place (68:17)

Paul deliberately applies the imagery of Psalm 68 – WHY?

- “because he saw in the exaltation of Jesus a further fulfilment of this description of the triumph of God. Christ ascended as conqueror to the Father’s right hand, **his train of captives being the principalities and powers he had defeated, dethroned and disarmed.**” Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God’s new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 143–194). InterVarsity Press.

Paul deliberately changes Receiving to Giving, WHY?

He IS NOT theoretically connecting the two...is there empirical/historical evidence for changing Receiving to Giving?

They seem to contradict but do they?

- What does the context say?

Psalm 68:18

*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.*

- In the ancient world, after every conquest in the ancient world there was invariably both a receiving of tribute and a distributing of largesse: **What conquerors took from their captives, they gave away to their own people.**
The spoils were divided, the booty was shared.
- Hebrew = brought rather than received
Aramaic = Gave
Syriac = Gave
Traditionally, already accepted as GAVE

² VanGemeren, W. A. (2008). [*Psalms*](#). In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Psalms (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 5, p. 517). Zondervan.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

- Liturgical custom in the synagogues associated Psalm 68 with Pentecost, the Jewish feast commemorating the giving of the law. Paul’s use of it in reference to **the Christian Pentecost then makes a remarkable analogy.**

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Psalm 68:18

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Receiving and Giving belong together:

Acts 2:33

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having **received** from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has **poured out this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing.

Let’s Continue:

B. Ephesians 4:9-10

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Christ’s gifts to the church

His ascension into heaven

Does the descended follow the ascension or proceed it?

What is Paul referring to?

- The “Harrowing of Hell” or of
- Christ’s Incarnation here on earth?

1 Peter 3:19

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered^[b] once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

1. Went into hades to remove the Saints to where the new 'heaven' would be since Jesus defeated death.
2. Reference to Noah being Christ-type to his generation
3. Prove to the demons in hades that He was victorious over them.

The general consensus of modern scholarship, regardless of theological orientation, holds to the third option—seeing the *pneumata* as non-human, demonic spirits being punished (for a diversity of theological viewpoints that agree here, see Schreiner 2003, 185–87; Senior 2003, 101–4; Hiebert 1992, 243; Elliott 2000, 658–62; Achtemeier 1996, 239–40, 245; and Jobes 2005, 242–45). In other words, sometime after Jesus' crucifixion (and, possibly, resurrection), he proclaimed victory to the sinful spirits who had instigated the sin that resulted in the flood and were now imprisoned (i.e., the "sons of God" of Gen 6:1–4). Most commentators note the conceptual similarity between 1 Peter and 1 Enoch's story of the Watchers here, though as Jobes (2005, 245) points out, "The fact that Peter neither refers to Enoch nor quotes from 1 Enoch shows that he is not interested in accrediting or exegeting 1 Enoch but is simply using a tradition that would have been familiar to his readers." Regardless of any link to 1 Enoch, however, "The imprisoned spirits of 1 Peter 3 are the fallen angels of 2 Peter 2:4" (Mounce 2005, 56). Peter's use of the broader *kēryssō* ("proclaim") instead of the narrower *euangelizō* ("proclaim the good news") thus makes sense (see Dalton 1989, 154–59). Jesus did not offer the gospel to these demons, but rather proclaimed his victory to them while they lay in chains, waiting for the final judgment (see also Jude 6). In other words, **Jesus Christ proclaimed a cosmic "in-your-face" to those demons who once tried to foil his plans in Noah's lifetime.** As for the identity of the "prison," Luke 8:31 (*abyssos*) and Jude 6 (*desmois aidiois hypo zophon tetērēken*) suggest that there may be a location reserved specifically for an especially degenerate class of demons to which free demons dread being sent.³

Section II: Gifts of the Trinity

Ephesians 4:11-16 [7, 11-3, 14-16]

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you [I BEG YOU] to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

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[BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION:]

11 And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers],¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

³ Himes, P. A. (2017). *1 Peter* (D. Mangum, E. Vince, & A. Salinger, Eds.; 1 Pe 3:19–22). Lexham Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Ephesians 4:7

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of **Christ's gift**.

A. Ephesians 4:11-16 (1 Corinthians 12:28)

Vocational Gifts of the Son (Diakonia)

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers], ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

1 Corinthians 12:28

²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, **then** gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.

Ministry, diakonia. *Diakonia* occurs some thirty-four times in the New Testament. Its basic meaning is “rendering personal help, aid or assistance to others.” In secular Greek it was used for the activity of waiting on tables, caring for household needs or serving in general. It is from the same Greek root as the word for “deacon” (1 Tim. 3:8).⁴

B. Romans 12:1-8

Motivational gifts of the Father (Energemata)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Gifts of Grace

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to **the measure of faith that God has assigned**. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

C. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Charismata Gifts of the Spirit

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, **but the same Spirit**; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same **Lord**; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same **God** who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the **Spirit** for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the **Spirit** the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same **Spirit**, ⁹ to another faith by the same **Spirit**, to another gifts of healing by the one **Spirit**,¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to

⁴ Hayford, J. W., & Matsdorf, G. (1993). [People of the Spirit: gifts, fruit and fullness of the Holy Spirit](#). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ **All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as He wills.**

- Hayford and Stott support this understanding of Trinitarian gifting.

Ephesians 4: ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—*⁵ **one Lord, one faith, one baptism,** ⁶ **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

THE CHURCH:

- **First**, believers were equipped with power to do God’s work, just as in Old Testament days.

Luke 6:40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

- **Second**, all are priests in this new community

1 Peter 2:5

⁵ *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* ¹⁰ *Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

- **Third**, this community is a prophetic one.

Prophets were responsible for both “forthtelling” the Word of God and “foretelling” the future events ordained by God. Joel (Heb. “Yahweh is God”) was the son of Pethuel.⁵

FORETELL – Daniel

prolego (προλέγω, 4302), with the aorist form *proeipon*, and a perfect form *proeireka* (from *proereo*), signifies (1) “to declare openly” or “plainly,” or “to say” or “tell beforehand” (*pro*, “before,” *lego*, “to say”), translated in 2 Cor. 13:2 (in the first sentence), RV, “I have said beforehand,” KJV, “I told ... before”, in the next sentence, KJV, “I foretell,” RV, “I do say beforehand” (marg., “plainly”); not prophecy is here in view, but a warning given before and repeated (see under FOREWARN); (2) “to speak before, of prophecy,” as “foretelling” the future, Mark 13:23, KJV, “have foretold,” RV, “have told ... beforehand”; Acts 1:16 (of the prophecy concerning Judas); Rom. 9:29; 2 Pet. 3:2; Jude 17; some inferior mss. have it in Heb. 10:15. See FOREWARN, SPEAK, TELL.

Note: In Acts 3:24 some mss. have *prokatangelo* (see FORESHEW); the most authentic have *katangelo*, RV, “told.”⁶

⁵ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (Joe 1:1). Thomas Nelson.

⁶ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Vol. 2, pp. 249–250). T. Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

FORTHTELL – Paul

By *forthtelling*, we mean that these prophets told forth the Word of God. They were conscious that they were doing this. They used such expressions as, “Thus says the Lord,” or “The word of the Lord came to me” (See Jer. 1:9 and Ezek. 2:7).⁷

1 Peter 1:10-13

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹ inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Called to Be Holy

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In order to accomplish these three components, we need the help of God, all three aspects.

[Four handouts]

Ephesians 4:11-16 [7, 11-3, 14-16]

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⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

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¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

⁷ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 931). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

1 Corinthians 12:27-29

*²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed (set some) in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, **then** miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. ESV*

And I will show you a still more excellent way. [LOVE]

Chapters 1 through 3 in Ephesians presents a rapturous worship of God.

Ephesians 4 reveals the Church as a school of worship where we learn to reflect the master Teacher. Paul saw his converts as presented in **living worship** before God (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22, 28). Knowing doctrine or correcting falsehood is not enough; one's whole life must praise God. Worship is at the heart of church growth and revival.

Lim, D. (2007). [Spiritual Gifts](#). In S. M. Horton (Ed.), *Systematic Theology: Revised Edition* (pp. 457–488). Logion Press.

Vocational Gifts from the Son

The Sons' Diakonia (Ministry) Giftings
To Facilitate and Equip the Body of Christ
(Resource: *The Bible Handbook* by J.W. Hayford)

The Spiritual Gifts from Christ (diakonia) are listed in **Ephesians 4:11** and **1 Corinthians 12:28**.

These are Vocational giftings. They are for those Christ calls to prepare, build up, equip His Body, the Church. Unlike the Gifts from the Father (energemata) and from the Holy Spirit (charismata), these gifts are for those called into a vocation of ministry.

Yes, that does mean they are not for everyone. It is a personal calling to fulfill. We have an example in Timothy.

1 Timothy 4:13-14 *¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation[preaching], to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ESV*

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers[shepherd/teachers], ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

1 Corinthians 12:28

*²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, **then** gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.*

Ephesians 4:11-13 (This listing is sometimes referred to as the Five-fold ministry giftings. In error taught that everyone falls under one of the categories.)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

11 And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds[pastors] and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, ESV

Apostle: Delegate, Ambassador, Commissioner, Messenger, He that is sent

- a. In apostolic days referred to a select group chosen to carry out directly the ministry of Christ; included the assigned task given to a few to complete the sacred canon of the Holy Scriptures.
- b. Implies the exercise of a distinct representative role of broader leadership given by Christ.
- c. Functions as a messenger or spokesman of God.
- d. In contemporary times refers to those who have the spirit of apostleship in remarkably extending the work of the church, opening fields to the gospel, and overseeing larger sections of the body of Jesus Christ.

Prophet: Foreteller, Inspired speaker

- a. A spiritually mature spokesman/proclaimer with a special, divinely focused message to the church or the world that has been received from the Lord God. Speaking the Word of God. (Forth-telling)
- b. A person uniquely gifted at times with insight into future events. (Foretelling)

Evangelist: A preacher of the gospel

- a. Refers primarily to a special gift of preaching or witnessing in a way that brings unbelievers into the experience of salvation.
- b. Functionally, the gift of evangelist operates for the establishment of new works, while pastors and teachers follow up to organize and sustain.
- c. Essentially, the gift of evangelist operates to establish converts and to gather them spiritually and literally into the body of Christ. (They have special ability to diagnose a sinner's condition, probe the conscience, answer objections, encourage decisions for Christ, and help the convert find assurance through the word.)

Pastor: Shepherd

- a. The word "pastor" comes from a root meaning "to protect," from which we get the word "shepherd."
- b. Implies the function of a shepherd/leader to nurture, teach, and care for the spiritual needs of the body.
(There is a ministry of wise counsel, correction, encouragement, and consolation.)

Teacher: Instructor, Doctor, Master

- a. In classical Greek, the root meaning of *didasko* suggested the idea of causing someone to accept



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

something. It can be translated “to teach, inform, instruct, demonstrate or prescribe.”

b. It has as its aim that of systematically communicating knowledge and skill so as to develop people.

c. Teachers give themselves to facts and systematic instruction. In the New Testament, the focus of teaching is

how to live out God’s will. (Teachers are those who are divinely empowered to explain what the Bible says,

interpret what it means, and apply it to the hearts and consciences of the saints.)

1 Corinthians 12:27-29

*²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has **appointed** (set some) in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, **then** miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But earnestly desire the higher gifts. ESV*

And I will show you a still more excellent way. [LOVE]

Notice the vocational giftings of apostle, prophet, teacher are numbered in the beginning of this verse (first, second, third) followed by the adverb **THEN which means “for the rest”**. It appears there is a break in the list of vocational giftings. Followed by a list of gifts sent to the church/body for its operation. The belief is this is a partial listing.

Workers of Miracles: Miraculous power, ability, abundance, power, strength

Healing: A cure, healing

Helps: Relief, help, assist

Administration: Directorship, government

Speaking in tongues: The tongue, implies language unnaturally acquired

WHY?

Ephesians 4:14-16

¹⁴ So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

*¹⁵ Rather, **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, **when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.***

- Do I enjoy hearing all “the new” that is in scripture? [Going deeper] [Red flag: God has revealed to me...if it is not in scripture.]
- Am I addicted to following a prophet? Especially on line.
- Do I make decisions based on what a person of authority says or do I read God’s word to make sure?
- Is my church family only online?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

- Do I operate in the Spirit **with [not to]** other people?
- Where do I get “speaking the truth in love” shared with me?
- Where do “speak the truth in love”?
- Do I use “speaking the truth in love” to gather my own following?
- Do I use “speaking the truth in love” to ostracize other people?
- Have I cultivated Christian friendships? (Foundational 15)

Want to do all the warfare there is to affect the unsaved world around us?
Praying for revival? DO EPHESIANS 4.

Read Ephesians 4 again.

Ephesians 4:14-16 NLT

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. ¹⁵ Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. ¹⁶ He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

WEEK 11 NOTES:

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Spiritual Gifts

David Lim

The revival and growth of Christianity around the world, especially in third world countries, is a powerful testimony that spiritual gifts are at work advancing God's kingdom. **The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement grew from 16 million in 1945 to 405 million by 1990. The ten largest churches in the world belong to this movement.**

Exegesis of all New Testament passages bearing on spiritual gifts is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, my focus will be on Paul's main teachings on gifts in the Church and in the believer's daily lifestyle, how gifts and fruit interrelate, and how to exercise gifts. **Biblical teaching without practice is disappointment; practice without solid teaching is dangerous.** On the other hand, scholarship should lead to practice, and practice may enlighten scholarship.

The baptism in the Holy Spirit is covered in chapter 13. I must emphasize, however, three key purposes of the outpouring at Pentecost.

First, believers were equipped with power to do God's work, just as in Old Testament days. The anointing of the Spirit in the Old Testament was for every ministry God desired to raise up: priests, tabernacle craftsmen, military leaders, kings, prophets, musicians. **The purpose of the anointing was to equip people for service.** It is in this context that Luke and Acts discuss the Spirit's anointing. In Luke 1 through 2, an anointing rested upon two elderly priests, Zechariah and Simeon. Two women, Elizabeth and Mary, were anointed to miraculously bear and raise children. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb, not to be a priest like his father, but to be the prophet and forerunner of the Messiah. Likewise, in Acts, the focus is on an anointing that empowered the Church and changed the world.

Second, all are priests in this new community. From Israel's beginnings as a nation, God desired that all Israel would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). The priestly role included worship, prayer, teaching, edifying, reconciling, counseling, loving, building relationships, and bringing hurting people to God. So believers, "like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5).

Third, this community is a prophetic one. Moses told Joshua, "I wish that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num. 11:29). Joel spoke of the Spirit's coming upon all flesh to prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). Jesus identified His own ministry as prophetic (Isa. 61:1-3; Luke 4:18-19). Peter equated the experience at Pentecost with the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:16-18). Paul said, "You can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31). Clearly the Church serves in a prophetic role, bringing God's presence and powerful Word to sinners, to ethical issues, and to nations and individuals.

Paul moves beyond the Luke-Acts context. He focuses on activating the gifts, developing the fruit, walking in the Spirit, and building the believers in the local church to maturity. Paul saw the Church as an interdependent, interactive organism—with Christ as its head—**walking righteously and powerfully in anticipation of the Lord's return.** **To grasp Paul's view of the Church, one must understand the gifts.**

THE CHURCH THROUGH THE EXPRESSION OF GIFTS

Paul's greatest thinking on the Church was written to the churches at Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus. These churches were instrumental to Paul's missions strategy. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 through 13, and Ephesians 4 were written from the same basic outline. Although these were different churches, the same principles are emphasized. Each parallel passage serves as insightful commentary on the others. Paul discusses our part in exercising the gifts, the Trinity's modeling of unity and diversity, unity and diversity in the body of Christ, **our ethical relationships to each other**—and all in light of Christ's ultimate judgment.

The context of these parallel passages is worship. After expounding on great doctrines of the faith (Rom. 1 through 11), Paul teaches that the fitting response is a life of worship (Rom. 12 through 16). First Corinthians 11 through 14 also has to do with worship.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Chapters 1 through 3 in Ephesians presents a rapturous worship of God. **Ephesians 4 reveals the Church as a school of worship where we learn to reflect the master Teacher.** Paul saw his converts as presented in **living worship** before God (Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 4:14; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22, 28). Knowing doctrine or correcting falsehood is not enough; one’s whole life must praise God. Worship is at the heart of church growth and revival.

Study the following chart. Note the flow of the argument, the similarities, and the purposes Paul has in mind. Then, we shall examine key principles from these passages.⁷

Main Points	Romans	1 Corinthians	Ephesians
Incarnational Nature	12:1	12:1–2	4:1–3
Exhortation	12:1	12:1	4:1
The Body	12:1	12:2	
The renewed mind	12:2	12:3; 13:1	4:2–3, 17–24
Humility	12:3	13:4–5	4:2
Meekness or loss of control?	12:1–2	12:2–3; 13:4–7	4:2, 14–15
Unity and Diversity in the Trinity		12:4–6	4:4–6
Spirit		12:4	4:4
Lord (Jesus)		12:5	4:5
Father		12:6	4:6
The Lists of Gifts— The Diversities of Ministries (see also 1 Peter 4:9–11)	12:6–8	12:7–11, 28–31; 13:1–3	4:7–12
Functional nature	12:6–8	12:11, 29–30	4:7, 11
Guidelines	12:6–8	12:7, 12, 19, 24–25; 13:1–13	4:11–12
One Body, Many Members	12:4–5	12:12–27	4:15–16, 25–29



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Edification	12:6–16	12:7; 14:3–6, 12, 16–	4:12–13, 17, 26
Empathy	12:10, 15	12:25–26	4:16
Sincere Love	12:9–21	13:1–13	4:25–5:2
Hate evil, cling to good	12:9	13:6	4:25
Gentleness	12:10	13:4–5	4:32
Zeal	12:11	13:6	4:1, 23–24
Rejoicing, steadfastness, prayer	12:12	13:7–8	
Fellowship with those in need	12:8, 13	13:3	4:28
No unwholesome talk	12:14	13:11	4:26–29
Humble mindset	12:16	12:25; 13:4	4:2, 23
No revenge	12:17	13:5	4:31
Be at peace	12:18		4:3
Handling anger	12:17	13:5–6	4:26, 31
Final Judgment	12:19–21	13:10, 12	4:13, 15, 30

INCARNATIONAL NATURE OF GIFTS

Believers play a vital part in gift ministry. Note the parallels in these passages. Romans 12:1–3 tell us: Present your bodies and minds in spiritual worship. Test and approve what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 12:1–3 says: Don't lose control of your bodies. Don't be deceived by false doctrine, but let Jesus be Lord. And Ephesians 4:1–3: Live worthy of God's calling. Have the right attitude. Keep the unity of the Spirit.

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit and therefore must be involved in our worship. Many pagan religions teach a dualism of body and spirit. For them the body is evil and is a prison, while the spirit is good and to be set free. This view was common in Greek thought.

Paul urged the Corinthians not to let their pagan past influence them. They used to lose control; consequently, they might utter anything, claiming it was the Spirit of God. The



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

biblical context of gifts does not indicate lack of control. Rather, as the Spirit works through us, we are more in control than ever. We yield our body and mind as instruments to God. We bring a transformed mind, placing it under the lordship of Christ, and come with a meek, disciplined spirit to allow God to work through us. Ephesians 4:1–3 tells us that right attitudes lead to effective ministry. **Thus, body, mind, and attitudes become instruments for the glory of God.**

There are various views on the nature of the gifts of the Spirit. One view sees the gifts as natural abilities. For example, a singer has the gift of music or a physician (via medical science) has the gift of healing. But human talent alone can never change the world.

Another view sees gifts as totally supernatural. This view denies human involvement, saying the Spirit bypasses the mind. It sees the flesh as being evil and capable of only distortion. A danger here is that few will have the courage to exercise the gifts. Most will feel unworthy, viewing the gifts as mystical or beyond their comprehension. They will fear making a mistake. However, sharing a gift is no proof of holiness or of spiritual attainment.

A third view is biblical: The gifts are incarnational. That is to say, God works through humans. Believers submit their minds, hearts, souls, and strength to God. They consciously, willingly surrender their all to Him. The Spirit supernaturally enables them to minister beyond their abilities, at the same time expressing each gift through their life experience, character, personality, and vocabulary. The gifts manifested need to be evaluated. That in no way lessens their effectiveness, but rather allows the congregation to test their biblical truth and edification value.

This incarnational principle is seen in God's revelation to humankind. Jesus is Immanuel, God with us (fully God and fully human). The Bible is both a divine book and a human book. It is divine, inspired by God, authoritative, and inerrant. It is human, reflecting the writers' backgrounds, life situations, personalities, and ministries. The Church is both a divine and a human institution. God established the Church or there would be no Church. Yet, we know how very human the Church is. God works through jars of clay (2 Cor. 4:7). The mystery hidden for ages and now revealed to the Gentiles is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

We need not fear. What God ministers through your life, ministry, and personality may be different from what He ministers through others. We should not feel that we are guaranteeing perfection when we share a gift. It can be lovingly evaluated by others. We need only to be a yielded vessel seeking to build the body of Christ. Rather than focusing on whether a gift is fully from God, we ask the more vital question, How can I best meet the needs of others and touch sinners for Christ? Understanding this principle alone can set the Church free to manifest gifts.

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE TRINITY

To the superficial reader, the discussion of the Trinity at this point may seem not to add to the argument. But for Paul, it is foundational. Even the order in which Paul lists the Trinity in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 and in Ephesians 4:4–6 is the same: Spirit, Lord, Father. Each Person of the Trinity plays a vital part in the manifestation of gifts. Sometimes the roles overlap, but essentially the Father superintends the plan of salvation and the expression of the gifts from beginning to end. Jesus redeems us and sets us in our place of ministry in His body, the Church. The Holy Spirit gives gifts. The Persons of the Godhead have different roles, yet vitally work together, blending into a perfect unity of expression.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

The Church must seek to reflect the nature of the Lord whom it serves. There is no schism, divisiveness, carnal pride, self-glorification, one-upmanship, or usurping of another's territory in the Trinity. We must not do what we want, but what we see God doing (John 5:19). What a difference this will make in the way we share the gifts! Ministered properly, the gifts reveal the coordination, the creative unity in diversity, and the wisdom and power the Spirit blends together. Everywhere we see diversity. The Church may face a variety of situations. But we can have this blending by the Spirit into a greater unity through falling before God, whose holiness, power, and purposes are awesome.

THE DIVERSITIES OF MINISTRIES

There are many gifts. No list is meant to be exhaustive. Twenty-one are listed in these passages. All are complementary; none is complete in and of itself. For example, every gift in Romans 12:6–8 can usefully be applied to a counseling situation. Some gifts in one list are easily related to gifts in other lists. The gift of giving may manifest itself in showing mercy, helps, exhorting, or even martyrdom. With this overlap we find that some gifts are easily identified by all, such as tongues and interpretation, healings, and miracles. Yet other gifts, such as a word of wisdom, a word of knowledge, discerning of spirits, and prophecy, may need evaluation to identify.

Personal inadequacy leads to interdependence. Each believer is only one member of the body of Christ; each needs other members: Together they can do what one individual cannot do. Even when people manifest the same gifts, they do it differently, with different results. No one person shares any gift in its total manifestation. Each needs the sharing of others as well.

Gifts must be shared in love because of the danger of miscommunication, even by those with the sincerest intentions. And every gift must be evaluated by others.

Paul is intensely practical. In the area of gifts he says nothing that is merely theoretical. Most writers have divided the gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 into the three categories of mind, power, and speech, with three gifts in each category. This is a convenient and logical division. However, based on 1 Corinthians 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 14:1–33, I believe Paul is making a functional division.

From Paul's use of the Greek word *heteros* ("another of a different kind") twice in 1 Corinthians 12:6–8, we can see the gifts divided into three categories of two, five, and two gifts respectively.

Teaching (and Preaching) Gifts:

- The message of wisdom
- The message of knowledge

Ministry Gifts (to the church and world):

- Faith
- Gifts of healings
- Miraculous powers
- Prophecy
- Distinguishing between spirits

Worship Gifts:

- Different kinds of tongues
- Interpretation of tongues



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

This threefold division may be confirmed by dividing 1 Corinthians 14 into paragraphs. In 1 Corinthians 14:1–5 the functional value of tongues and interpretation may be compared with prophecy in teaching (1 Cor. 14:6–12), worship (1 Cor. 14:13–19), evangelism (1 Cor. 14:20–25), and ministry to the Body (1 Cor 14:26–33). Note that Paul adds the further category in 1 Corinthians 14:20–25 of “a sign ... for unbelievers” (1 Cor. 14:22).

Teaching, ministry of the body of Christ to the Church and the world, and worship are three keys to a healthy local assembly. If we have only two of these categories without the third we have imbalance and open ourselves to difficulties. For example, if we have teaching and ministry without strong worship, we may lose much of the thrust of revival. We may readily burn out in our zeal in serving. If we have teaching and worship without practical ministry, our members will become lazy, ingrown, ineffective, critical, and divisive.

If we have ministry and worship without solid teaching, we open ourselves to extremes and wildfire that will damage the revival in both the short term and long term. Without the complement of all, the local assembly cannot reach its potential. Clearly Paul is interested in practical results, that which will set the body of Christ free for discipling, evangelism, unity, and Christlikeness.

The Message of Wisdom. Teaching, seeking divine guidance, counseling, and addressing practical needs in church government and administration may offer occasions for the gift of wisdom. It must not be limited to church worship or classroom experiences, however. It teaches people to grow spiritually as they apply their hearts to wisdom and make choices leading to maturity. The gift, however, is a message, proclamation, or declaration of wisdom and does not mean that those ministering the message are necessarily wiser than others.

Our faith must not rest on human wisdom (1 Cor. 2:5). If we lack wisdom, we are exhorted to ask God for it (James 1:5). Jesus promised His disciples “words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict” (Luke 21:15). That this promise referred to a supernatural gift is shown by His command “not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves” (Luke 21:14). The gift therefore goes beyond both human wisdom and human preparation.

The Message of Knowledge. This gift has to do with teaching the truths of the Word of God. It is not the product of study as such. Donald Gee described it as “flashes of insight into truth that penetrated beyond the operation of ... unaided intellect.”¹⁵ The gift may include such things as God’s sharing of His secrets, as when He revealed to the Old Testament prophets a time of rain, an enemy’s plans, or secret sins of kings and servants. It may also include Peter’s knowledge of Ananias and Sapphira’s deception and Paul’s declaration of a judgment of blindness upon Elymas.

Faith. Fervent prayer, extraordinary joy, and unusual boldness accompany the gift of faith. It is not saving faith, but rather a miraculous faith for a special situation or opportunity, such as Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:33–35). It can include special ability to inspire faith in others, as Paul did on board the ship in the storm (Acts 27:25).

Gifts of Healings. In Acts many responded to the gospel and were saved after being miraculously healed. In the Greek, both “gifts” and “healings” are plurals. Therefore, it seems that no one is given *the* gift of healing. Rather, many gifts are available to meet the needs of specific cases at specific times. Sometimes God heals sovereignly and sometimes He heals according to the faith of the sick person. The one who prays for the sick person is just the agent; the sick person (whether sick physically or emotionally) is the one who needs and actually receives the gift. In every case, God alone must receive the glory. We, however, can join our faith with that of the sick person, and together set the climate of love and acceptance



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

so that gifts of healing may flow. In the body of Christ are power and strength to meet the needs of the struggling member. This is the incarnational aspect of healing.

Miraculous Powers. Here Paul combines two plurals, of *dunamis* (deeds of mighty supernatural power) and *energēma* (effectual results). This gift may have to do with providing protection, giving provision, casting out demons, altering circumstances, or passing judgment. The Gospels record miracles in the context of the manifestation of the messianic Kingdom (or rule), the defeat of Satan, the power of God, and the presence and work of Jesus. The Greek word for “miracle” (Gk. *sēmeion*) in John emphasizes its sign value to encourage people to believe and keep on believing. The book of Acts emphasizes the continuation of that work in the Church, showing that Jesus is Victor.

Prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 14 prophecy refers to a variety of Spirit-inspired spontaneous messages in the speaker’s known language “for their strengthening [especially of faith], encouragement [especially to move ahead in faithfulness and love], and comfort [that cheers and revives hope and expectation]” (1 Cor. 14:3). By this gift the Spirit illumines the progress of God’s kingdom, reveals the secrets of peoples’ hearts, and puts the sinner under conviction (1 Cor. 14:24–25). A good example is Acts 15:32, “Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.”

Those regularly used in the gift of prophecy were called prophets. However, any believer may exercise this gift. But it must be weighed carefully (and publicly) by “the others,” that is, by the congregation (1 Cor. 14:29). This evaluation should include what God’s purpose is, so that everyone may learn and benefit.

Distinguishing between Spirits. “Distinguishing” and “spirits” are both plurals in the Greek. This indicates that there are a variety of ways this gift may be manifested. Since it is mentioned directly after prophecy, many scholars see it as a companion gift involved in the “weighing” (1 Cor. 14:29). It involves a supernaturally given perception, differentiating between spirits,²⁰ with an emphasis on protecting us from the attacks of Satan and evil spirits (cf. 1 John 4:1). It allows us to use all the gifts and the Word of God to work against Satan in order to then make a full, free proclamation of the gospel.

Like the other gifts, this one does not raise an individual to a new level of ability. Nor does it give anyone the power to go around looking at people and telling of what spirit they are. It is a specific gift for a specific occasion.

Tongues and Interpretation. The gift of tongues needs interpretation to be effective in the congregation. Some say that because these two gifts are listed last they are the least in importance. Such a conclusion is insupportable. All five gift lists in the New Testament have the gifts in a different order.

In the gift of tongues the Holy Spirit touches our spirit. We find liberation to exalt God’s goodness and we edify ourselves: We are built up spiritually as we speak. Then when the interpretation allows the congregation to understand what is being said, they are encouraged to worship. Praise more readily follows the gift of tongues and interpretation than it does the gift of prophecy. Prophetic utterances are more instructional.

The basic difference between the phenomenon of tongues in Acts and in 1 Corinthians is purpose. The tongues in Acts were for self-edification, giving evidence that the disciples had indeed received the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, which was to clothe them “with power from on high” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5, 8; 2:4). They did not need to be interpreted. In Corinth the purpose was to bless others in the congregation, making communication necessary.

The Holy Spirit distributes all these gifts according to His creative power and sovereignty. The word “determines” (1 Cor. 12:11 Gk. *bouletai*) is in the present tense and strongly implies



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

His continually creative personality. We notice also that the Bible does not draw lines between the gifts. “Encouraging” is part of the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:3, yet in Romans 12:8 it is treated as a separate gift. The categories of gifts given above are not mutually exclusive. Further, different personalities may express gifts differently in a variety of ministries.

In 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 Paul taught that there are differing gifts (Gk *charismatōn*) ministries (Gk. *diakoniōn*), and results (Gk. *energēmaton*). That is to say, each gift may be exercised through different ministries and come up with different God-honoring results. By using the analogy of different members of the Body, by saying God sets members in the Body as He desires, giving us different ministries with various results, and by the outline of 1 Corinthians 14, we see Paul is talking about practical function. Incredible diversity, incredible practicality!

By looking at the parallel passages and adding 1 Peter 4:10–11 we see the following thirteen guidelines:

1. We should exercise our ministry in proportion to our faith.
2. We should concentrate on our known ministries and develop them.
3. We must maintain the right attitudes: give generously, lead diligently, show mercy cheerfully.
4. We all have different functions in the body of Christ and must understand the relationship to the whole body.
5. Gifts are to edify all, not just the individual.
6. One must have no sense of superiority or inferiority, for every member is equally important.
7. The gifts are given to us; we do not attain them. God’s will and sovereignty determine distribution. His specific action of placing these gifts in the Church is shown by the following verbs: given (Rom. 12:6), appointed (1 Cor. 12:28), and gave (Eph. 4:11). Paul further affirms in 1 Corinthians 12:28–31 that we should concentrate on the known ministries God has given us.
8. At the same time, these are God-given manifestations, not human talents. God continuously grants gifts as He wills. We should be open to them all. If we know what part of the Body we are and what our ministries are, we can then channel the gifts effectively.
9. Though we may exercise a gift to its fullest, apart from love, such exercise is futile. Clearly, we have only partial knowledge; we can share only partial knowledge. Gifts are continually given according to one’s measure of faith (not once for all). The gifts must be tested; they fall under the commands of our Lord. The focus is the maturation of the church, not the greatness of the gift. These truths should lead us to a humility, an appreciation for God and others, and an eagerness to obey Him.
10. Enabling ministries have a special function to set others free for their ministries and develop maturity in them. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers are gifts to the Church. They appear in historical order in the founding and establishing of the church, rather than some ranking of authority (1 Cor. 12:28).
11. We are to minister God’s grace in its various forms. First Peter 1:6 reveals that Christians had suffered grief through its various forms; God has a special grace to minister to each grief. A faithful minister will know how to minister to the need. We are to choose carefully when, where, and how to best minister the grace of God.
12. We must minister confidently in the strength of the Lord. We must not be timid or do it in our own strength. This is similar to Romans 12 where we are to minister in proportion to our



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

faith, but Peter goes on to say, speak as if you are speaking the “very words of God”! (1 Pet. 4:11).

13. Finally, God must have all the glory. All the gifts are graces with which God has blessed His Church.

ONE BODY, MANY MEMBERS

Unity in the body of Christ is based upon our common experience of salvation. We are all sinners, saved by the grace of God.

Paul’s analogy of the Church to the physical body may have been too earthly for some of the spiritually minded Corinthians. They may have felt the flesh was evil. But God created the body. No better picture of the Church’s interaction and interdependence has been developed. From the time of his conversion on the Damascus Road, Paul realized that to persecute the Church was to persecute Christ himself (Acts 9:4). The church was nothing less than Christ’s body! Paul held a very high view of the Church and its value to God. We have a calling and an obligation to build one another up, help each member find a personal ministry, work at clear communication, and commit our lives to one another.

The world tears down. Christians build up. But to do so, we ourselves must be built up first. Speaking in tongues edifies us personally (1 Cor. 14:4, 14, 7–18). If we are not built up, we will be ministering from empty vessels; the devotional life of many modern Christians is sadly lacking. Prayer and worship are our inner strengths. But if we seek only personal edification we become like spiritual sponges. We must seek to build others up.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up” (Eph. 4:29). A healthy body builds itself up, being able to heal its own injuries. Edification should be the Church’s highest goal in its use of the gifts. Love builds up. The purpose of gifts is to build up. God’s people must be supportive, open, forgiving, reaching out. What an example such action would be to the world!

True fellowship is built on empathy. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn (Rom. 12:15). We are to have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Cor. 12:25–26). This is the opposite of the way the world thinks. It is easier to rejoice over those who weep, and weep over those who rejoice; human nature prefers to be judgmental. But believers belong to one another. My victory is your cause for rejoicing because the kingdom of God is advanced. Your victory lifts me up as well. Ephesians 4:16 gives us the culminating point of empathy: The Body builds itself up in love, as each supporting ligament receives from Christ and does its work.

The word for “supporting” is *epichorēgias*. It is used in Greek literature to describe a choir leader bearing responsibility for abundantly supplying his group’s needs, or a leader supplying amply his army’s needs, or a husband caring amply for his wife, giving her abundant support. If each one fulfills his or her responsibility, health and vitality will result. What release of power can happen in this kind of fellowship! Miracles and healings can readily take place in such an atmosphere. If we can truly be supportive and open to one another, we will set Christians free to reach out to God for solutions.

We all have different personalities, temperaments, and ministries. We must have a commitment to understand one another and set each other free to minister. This takes time. As we learn about others, we begin to appreciate them, honor them, and grow in fellowship.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

SINCERE LOVE

After each of Paul's expositions on gifts, he beautifully crafts three messages from one outline on love (Rom. 12:9–12; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 4:17–32). Each passage is creatively different, yet the same essential points are there.

Anders Nygren says, "One needs only to make 'love' the subject throughout [Romans] 12:9–21 to see how close the contents of this section are to 1 Corinthians 13." The whole of Romans 12 is a unit. Paul is not speaking of two separate topics, gifts and ethics (love). The context of Romans 12 is the urgency of the hour, how good must triumph over evil, and living in light of Christ's return. The people of God must live in right relationships. Neither may 1 Corinthians 12 and 13 be divided: The context for exercising gifts is love. Ephesians 4 emphasizes the dramatic difference between our former life as pagans and our new life in Christ. That is why we must speak the truth in love. Love is practical when we build one another up. The three passages develop separate themes. Yet, good over evil, love in exercise of gifts, and truth in love are three dynamic expressions of love—Messiah's army marches with a different methodology! Our lifestyle is key to effective utilization of gifts. (We will discuss this more in the section on "The Relation Between Gifts and Fruit.")

ULTIMATE JUDGMENT

Leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19–21).

When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.... Now we see but a poor reflection; ... then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Cor. 13:10, 2).

Reach unity in the faith ... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.... In all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.... Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:13, 15, 30).

By examining these verses we see that all three passages on love are written in the context of Christian conduct in light of Christ's coming. We do not build our ethics around philosophy, culture, or convenience, but around the righteousness of God and in view of His final judgment. Theologians call it eschatological conduct.

The quotation in Romans 12:20 is from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Prov. 25:21–22). In these passages on love, Paul has quoted Jesus, the Law, the wisdom literature, and shared a prophetic concern for the poor and needy. This is God's wisdom. To "heap burning coals on his head" may picture an Egyptian practice of placing a pan of burning charcoal on one's head, indicating penitence. If so, Paul is saying that through love we may lead the person to repentance. Let the enemy realize it is God he is fighting, not us. We do not want to defeat our human enemies; we wish to win them to the Lord! We must not succumb to Satan's pressures. The warfare is between the evil and the good. We can conquer evil only with the good.

First Corinthians points to a time of total clarity when we shall see face-to-face and know fully as we are fully known. It is the day of the coming of the Lord; it is Judgment Day. All our actions will be judged by His standards (Rom. 2:6, 16).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

In Ephesians, references to the prophesied last things are plentiful. Paul speaks of the future point of full maturity and the day of redemption. We are sealed by the Spirit until that day (Eph. 4:13, 15, 30). But until then, the gifts are God's empowerment to accomplish the task of building up each other and touching the world. Paul's commands throughout Ephesians require radical, dramatic, urgent change. We must make the most of every opportunity (5:16). Christ seeks to present to himself a radiant Church (v. 27). Slaves and masters have a Master in heaven to answer to (6:9). And lastly the word "finally" (v. 10) may be a reference to the final days when the day of evil comes (v. 13).

The parallel passages of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 through 13, and Ephesians 4 focus on the lifestyle of the Spirit-filled believer—finding a place in the body of Christ, exercising gifts in love, witnessing and serving in anticipation of the coming of the Lord. This is the Church's purpose and calling. The Church is a school. As believers gather, they learn how to minister spiritual gifts and be disciples of Christ. As they go forth, they apply God's power to life's situations. We must be open to the Spirit's speaking through us at any time.

THE FUNCTIONS OF GIFTS

Paul contrasts the value of tongues and prophecy in four different functions in 1 Corinthians 14: teaching (vv. 6–12), worship (vv. 13–19), signs for the unbeliever (vv. 19–25), and ministry to the local church (vv. 26–33). He cautions against abuse of gifts and gives positive guidelines for their exercise. I have summarized key instructions below.

First, the key test of effectiveness of function is clear communication. Communication is complex. Clear communication strengthens (v. 3). It is easy to misunderstand intentions, attitudes, and words. We are imperfect. That is why gifts must be exercised in love. Because of Corinthian selfishness, super-spirituality, and abuse of tongues, many problems arose. Paul reemphasizes the need for clarity of direction and instruction. Thus he uses prophecy to represent all gifts exercised in the known tongue. Tongues when interpreted encourage the congregation to worship (vv. 2, 5, 14–15) and is a gift as valid as prophecy. There is no biblical basis for calling some gifts superior and some inferior. Each gift does its unique work if communicated properly. Paul gives the analogy of flute, harp, or trumpet when played without a clear sound: There is no benefit to anyone else. In the local assembly we need to be clear on God's direction and what He says to all of us.

Paul valued the gifts of tongues for worship (v. 2) for selfedification (v. 4), for praying (v. 14), for giving thanks (v. 17), and as a sign to the unbeliever (v. 22). Paul prayed, sang, praised, and spoke in tongues (vv. 13–16). In fact, he spoke in tongues more than the exuberant Corinthians. He speaks of the value of praising and praying in the spirit and in the understanding.

The Corinthians had abused the gift: Some may have believed they were speaking in angelic languages (13:1), services may have been dominated by tongues (14:23), and speakers apparently interrupted each other to give their utterance in tongues, disregarding interpretation (vv. 27–28).

A key question of this passage is, Does Paul encourage or discourage periods of corporate worship where all speak in tongues? Two views are held on 1 Corinthians 14:23–24. One is that Paul was minimizing the use of tongues, and only two or three people at most should ever speak in tongues in a service for any reason. This rules out corporate worship in tongues. From this point of view, Paul is making a minimal concession to the tongues speakers at Corinth.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

A second view sees 1 Corinthians 14:23–24 as two parallel statements: everyone speaks in tongues; everyone prophesies. If verse 23 means everyone speaks in tongues “at the same time,” then verse 24 also refers to everyone prophesying “at the same time.” Obviously verse 24 cannot mean that. Everyone prophesying “at the same time” would be seen as confusion, if not lunacy. Paul does allow prophesying “one at a time” in ministry to the congregation (v. 31). Since prophecy represents all the gifts in the understood language, other gifts may be ministered prophetically.

The only limitation on prophetic messages is that which is “fitting and orderly.” The Corinthians were not to dominate the whole ministry time with tongues by speaking in tongues “one at a time.” A limit is placed on two or at the most three utterances in tongues and interpretations (v. 27). The basic purpose of tongues and interpretation is worship and encouraging others to worship God. If a congregation is ready to worship, it should need only two or three exhortations to move freely into this area.

In Acts 2:4; 10:44–46; and 19:6, all spoke in tongues in corporate worship. No interpretation is mentioned. Everyone worshipping in tongues at the same time cannot be denied from a biased interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:2, 22–25. Paul and Luke do not contradict each other.

If the primary purpose of tongues is to praise God, tongues with interpretation will encourage others to worship. To then deny people the opportunity to respond by worshipping God in tongues would seem to be a contradiction. Paul would then be saying “You may worship with understanding in the assembly, but not in Spirit.” Only two or three are allowed that experience.” What about meetings where prayer is the primary agenda? Or meetings to encourage others to receive the infilling of the Spirit? Or times of sheer celebration? When God touches us in any public gathering, we respond; however, our response must not draw undue attention to ourselves.

The Pentecostal-Charismatic revival around the world has not apologized for genuine celebration. It has encouraged wholehearted worship. The individual spirit is not suppressed for the corporate Body. Rather, it is fully utilized and controlled for that Body. Tongues have not been relegated to the prayer closet. Indeed, we learn through the model of corporate worship how to worship in private. If all understand that there are mutual times to praise God, no confusion exists.

All gifts have sign value and content value. The gift of tongues focuses on the sign aspect: It arouses attention. Prophecy focuses on content, though in some instances it has great sign value. It confronts people with God’s Word and invites repentance. Palmer Robertson points out: “ ‘Tongues’ serve as an indicator; ‘prophecy’ serves as a communicator. ‘Tongues’ call attention to the mighty acts of God; ‘prophecy’ calls to repentance and faith in response to the mighty acts of God.”

Healings have sign value for those observing and content value for those healed. Words of wisdom and knowledge focus more on content value, though at times may have great sign value. The issue is pragmatic: What is God doing and what is needed in the situation?

Although nothing can surpass or take the place of God’s Word, God continually speaks to churches and individual needs. We gather together to hear from God afresh; He speaks to our present situation through His Word and through the body of Christ. If we all come with a readiness to minister gifts and the opportunity is given, then ministry can flow. An ideal place for such ministry is in the small setting, such as a cell group. Tight schedules, large crowds, and shy members militate against such sharing in a Sunday worship service (1 Cor. 14:26).

Paul’s hand was steady as he guided the Corinthian church. Many were united against him. Some Corinthians thought they were superspiritual, feeling the Kingdom had arrived, that



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

there was no need for resurrection if they truly had faith. They alone had the fullest manifestation of gifts. Yet Paul does not react against them. He gives positive guidelines. First, prophecy must be clearly communicated so that it strengthens, encourages, and comforts (v. 3).

Second, the needs of believers, unbelievers, and inquiring seekers must be considered. Believers need to be instructed and edified (vv. 1–12), to give thanks along with other believers (vv. 17), to mature in thinking (v. 20), to minister a variety of gifts (vv. 26–33), to evaluate gifts (v. 29), and to be disciplined (v. 31). Unbelievers need to understand what is happening in a service (v. 16), to awaken to the fact that God is speaking (v. 22), and to have the secrets of the heart laid bare before God (v. 25) so that they may believe. Inquiring seekers need to understand what is happening in a service (v. 16), to not be confused (v. 23), and to know that God is truly among us (v. 25).

Third, it is important not to react. Paul says to the Corinthians, “eagerly desire spiritual gifts” (v. 1), be zealous for them and channel the zeal to build the Church (v. 12), and don’t forbid speaking in tongues (v. 39). Fear of extremes often causes churches to shrink from a complete gift ministry. The baby is thrown out with the bath water, the fire is feared because of possible wildfire, or, as the Chinese proverb puts it, we trim the toe to fit the shoe. On the other hand, to zealously follow an untested position that has little biblical base is to ask for problems that will hinder the very revival we all seek.

Sometimes we judge mercilessly and legalistically those who make mistakes. Then we dampen the will of others to begin ministry in gifts. Extreme fear of error may cut us off from God’s blessing. We must build on solid theology. But we must also teach in love, test revelations by what other mature believers in the Body sense from the Spirit, and develop, not deny, what may be a genuine gifting from the Spirit (vv. 39–40).

Fourth, accountability must be demanded. Throughout 1 Corinthians 14, Paul reveals that the corrections to excess are a healthy exercise of gifts, evaluation, and accountability. We are responsible to others.

In the worship service the highest priority is to build others up. Our lives, our methodology, and our utterances all have to be exercised in the context of what God is doing in the Church and must be willingly subject to the evaluation of the Body of believers. Excesses come when people exercise gifts or make statements that are accountable to no one.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE GIFTS AND THE FRUIT

What is the relationship between the Spirit’s gifts and the Spirit’s fruit? Fruit has to do with growth and character; lifestyle is the key test of genuineness. The fruit in Galatians 5:22–23 are the “nine graces which make up the fruit of the Spirit—the lifestyle of those who are indwelt and energized by the Spirit.” Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matt. 7:16–20; see also Luke 6:43–45). These aspects of fruit are intricately interwoven in the three gift passages. In the gift passages and in Galatians the fruit qualities flow horizontally in ministry to one another (1 Cor. 13: Rom. 12:9–10; Eph. 4:2). The prime theme of Galatians is not justification by faith, though this seems dominant. Rather, the purpose of justification by faith is the walk in the Spirit.

The same emphasis on the walk, or life, in the Spirit prevails in lessons to the churches in Asia Minor (Ephesus), Achaia (Corinth), and Italy (Rome).

Let us look at the fruit qualities in Galatians 5:22–23 and see how they are interwoven with the exercise of gifts in Paul’s gift passages.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

LOVE

The Greek *agap* is most frequently used of a loyal love and is seen in its highest degree as a revelation of the very nature of God. It is a steadfast, freely given love. Love is central to each passage (Rom. 12:9–21; 1 Cor. 13: Eph. 4:25 to 5:2). In fact, it is the ethical principle, the motivating force, and the proper methodology for all ministry. Without love there is little benefit to others and none to the person exercising the gift. Misunderstandings arise and the Church is divided; people are hurt. Love is the foundation from which gifts can be ministered and the context in which the gifts are to be received and understood.

JOY

The Greek *chara*, which we translate “joy,” includes the idea of an active delight. Paul speaks of rejoicing in truth (1 Cor. 13:6). The word is also closely connected to hope. Paul speaks of being joyful in hope (Rom. 12:12). It is the positive expectation that God is at work in the lives of fellow believers, a celebration of our ultimate victory in Christ. Joy is the heart of worship: It turns drudgery into delight, lifts ministry to a higher plane, and puts sparkle in the ministry of the gifts.

PEACE

The Greek *eirēnē* includes the ideas of harmony, health, wholeness, and well-being. In relationships, we are to live at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18); in exercise of gifts, God is not a God of disorder but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33); and in the assembly, we are to strive to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Peace is foundational to moving ahead in unity, to receiving the ministries of others, and to learning even though failure. The exercise of gifts should lead to greater unity and peace. Because we realize the need for each other and that God’s blessings flow through others, because no gift is exercised in perfect manifestation, and because we all make mistakes, it teaches us to be tender to one another and seek the greater good of all.

PATIENCE

The Greek word *makrothumia* means patience with people. It includes long-suffering and forbearance that endures the misconduct of others and never seeks revenge. The Roman Christians were soon to face persecution. During stress and suffering Christians may have less patience with each other, so Paul urges them to be “patient in affliction” (Rom. 12:12). In sharing gifts Paul starts with patience with people and ends with patience with circumstances (1 Cor. 13:4, 7). It takes time for us as the Church to mature through all our differences, differences stemming from culture, education, even personality. Therefore, Paul urges us to be completely humble and gentle; be patient (Eph. 4:2).

For full ministry in the Spirit, we need to learn together, make mistakes, grow, forgive, and confront in love without having a critical spirit. This takes patience. Whenever God’s power is manifested, it is important that we look to Him instead of looking at our inadequacies. Then we will not do the hasty thing or go to extremes that will hurt the Church.

KINDNESS



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

The Greek word *chrēstotēs* reminds us of Christ, the supreme example of kindness. Patience and kindness are coupled together in one line of Paul's description of God's love (1 Cor. 13:4). Paul urges us to follow Christ's example, to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving (Eph. 4:32). Harshness is not the way of the body of Christ. Mutual esteem and respect are. Kindness is a healing balm that unites us as we learn to appreciate each other. Even the gifts are the result of God's kindness to us. We do not deserve the gifts, nor do we deserve each other's kindness. We receive both with grateful hearts and then share both unconditionally.

GOODNESS

The essential meaning of *agathesunē*, translated "goodness," is generosity that flows out of holy righteousness given by God. Paul says, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Rom. 12:13). "Share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28).

The basic reason for all the gifts is to bless others. Goodness, or generosity, brings a practical, down-to-earth caring about people where they are. The Early Church knew how to care for one another. If anything, it erred on the side of generosity.

Although careless generosity is not good stewardship, our motive is to show generosity. A danger is that we show generosity in order to boast. In all our giving, we must have love, or it is of no benefit (1 Cor 13:3).

FAITHFULNESS

The Greek term *pistis* often means trust expressed in a life of faith. In this context it has the meaning "faithfulness." This reflects the nature of our Heavenly Father. He is dependable. He is patient toward us no matter how often we fail Him. He is committed to us: true to His great plan of redemption! We are to reflect God's image to others. We must be dependable. If we are committed to one another, God can truly pour forth the Spirit's blessings. Faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13) are qualities by which we build relationships with each other. Through unity of faith we can attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). Growth in this fruit builds confidence in God. It can be a stepping-stone to the gift of faith.

The gift of faith heads the category of five powerful gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 that have to do with the ministry of the body of Christ to one another.

GENTLENESS

The Greek word *prautēs* has the idea of a humble gentleness that is more concerned about others than oneself. Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). The cognate word *praus* means "meek," "humble," or "gentle." Aristotle described the word as the mean between excessive proneness to anger and incapacity for anger. A meek person has a disciplined spirit. Potentially, all spiritual blessings are available to this person. While the word itself is not used in Romans, this gentle spirit is described in Romans 12:12–14 as able to persevere in affliction and persecution, faithfully serving in prayer and practical care. It is a gentleness that knows God is in control and does not take revenge (Rom. 12:17–21; Eph. 4:26). Instead of being rude, self-seeking, and easily angered, we show gentleness, protect others, and persevere (1 Cor. 13:5, 7). Our attitude toward each other is to be completely humble, gentle, free from arrogance (2 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:2).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

Too often spiritual manifestations have been expressed in harsh, manipulative, and authoritarian ways. Rather than encouraging others in gift ministry, such a manner actually stifles it, especially ministry from the whole Body. How important that we learn to guard each other's dignity and save each other's pride. Be gentle!

SELF-CONTROL

The word *egkrateia* means “self-control,” including control of sensual passions; thus it includes chastity. This emphasis is not in the gift passages of Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 through 14. Earlier treatment of this subject is thorough, however. The new life is contrasted sharply with the old life in Ephesians 4:17–22. Immorality has no place in a person who seeks to be used of God. Without holy living accompanying the gifts, the name of Christ is shamed. Truly effective ministry is blunted. Miracles may continue for a while but God receives no glory. Miracles do not guarantee holiness, but holiness is vital to true spiritual ministry.

Gifts and fruit are carefully interspersed. When gifts are emphasized at the expense of fruit, a terrible price is paid. Christian character, holy living, and relationships with fellow believers are pushed aside with the rationale that God blesses us with power. Thus the work of the Holy Spirit is diluted. We must not divorce power from holiness. God purifies us to use us. Christians whose lives are consistent and unfettered by carnality will be free from condemnation. They will have a good reputation. They will be powerful.

Although neither age nor experience can guarantee spiritual maturity, the fruit of the Spirit produces it. Spiritual maturity means a greater understanding of the Spirit of God and the needs of people. Then we can best exercise gifts. Maturity develops sensitivity to the Spirit, so one might understand how the gifts operate and when they are needed. We will see the balance and not move to extremes. We will look to longterm results, not just short-term blessing. We will seek a revival that lasts until Jesus comes.

Spiritual maturity helps us relate to people. We understand people better and realize how to best minister to them. We must strive for unity. As people watch our character and conduct, they will develop trust in us; the Early Church chose its first seven deacons on the basis of how they were “known” (Acts 6:3). A good reputation and affirmation by others are crucial to a full release of the Spirit in ministry to one another and for the Church to grow.

The fruit becomes the method of exercising the gifts. All the fruit is wrapped up in love, and any gift, even in its fullest manifestation, apart from love is nothing. “On the other hand, a genuine fullness of the Holy Spirit is bound to produce fruit also because of the quickened and enriched life of communion with Christ. Knowing the awesome love, power, and grace of God should make us tender vessels. We do not deserve the gifts. God empowers us anyway. We will become Kingdom people, ready to bring in the harvest. We rise to a new realm.

THE EXERCISE OF THE GIFTS

Leadership plays the vital role in bringing a congregation to the point of exercising gifts. The following suggestions may prove helpful:

1. Provide opportunities. At board meetings, staff meetings, and staff retreats, give time for all to listen to the Spirit and share impressions God makes on their hearts. See if God is saying similar things to several people and if what is said relates to where the assembly is at that point. Pray for the sick, exercise ongoing concern, and if they are not healed immediately, pray again.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

2. Create awareness. Share how God speaks to you and guides you. Testify to miracles that take place among your people. Allow gifts to be manifested naturally; don't force or demand them. We are not here for the short term, but the long term. The Spirit may minister in a service, a cell-group meeting, or in personal conversation.

3. Develop a readiness to share. Gifts are manifested when people expect to hear from God, whether by Scripture, song, or a gentle whisper. Teach about hearing God's voice. Give practical application from your life and others. When worship leaders give time to share gifts, they themselves should be prepared to share. Don't allow long periods of silence to be characterized as "nobody heard from God." Rather we should say, "Let us wait in the presence of an awesome God, and if anyone has something to share, do so." Then positively conclude by sharing impressions God made on you. As leader, be ready to share. Model that expectancy.

4. Create a spirit of acceptance. Your people must not feel self-conscious or that others are judging them. Start in small groups. Use a natural tone of voice. Do not worry about mistakes, but teach gently, in love. The church is a school, and we are learners.

5. Evaluate. Comment after three or four share, whether choruses, Scripture, exhortations, or even testimonies. Does it fit the local assembly? Teach your people to be sensitive to what God may be saying in the whole service and what God is doing in your fellowship. Relate Scripture to what is said. Your positive reinforcement is crucial. To say nothing is to cause confusion or dampen further exercise of gifts. Affirm what can be affirmed, set aside as tentative whatever needs evaluation. Try not to criticize, but evaluate in love. Evaluation gives people a sense of security, a framework within which they can minister gifts.

6. Spend time in prayer. Build a church on prayer. There is no substitute for waiting on God. Practice the presence of God all day. God will speak to you and through you. Your people will pray only if we as leaders pray.

7. Understand cultural differences. The church I pastor is multicultural. The way I preach to the Chinese-educated and English-educated is different, even if the basic content is the same. In recent years we have seen many differences in worship style and in people's expectations as we talk to them before praying for them. In worship, some like hymns, some like choruses, some like music reflecting their culture and heritage. Some use complex interviews before prayer, some just pray over a large group of people. Be simple. Gifts shared in a natural tone of voice encourage others to share. We also encourage more dynamic sharing. We need not force each assembly into the same worship style or the same way of manifesting gifts as another.

8. Strong worship releases gifts. Worship leads to an expectancy of encountering our awesome God. That is where the miraculous can readily happen. Build to one or two peaks of worship. If people know there is a best time to share gifts, they will do so. But if you wait after every chorus, this is not as effective and may cause an uncertainty of whether or not to share. Worship should follow similar patterns. It gives people a sense of security and freedom to worship in that context. To change the pattern every week is not so effective. Incorporate psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Make room for the whole congregation to feel they can touch God in worship.

9. Often I will share from God first, give opportunity for others to share, then affirm what God has already said to me. This encourages others. I may say, "God has touched my heart with three thoughts, but before I share, I want to give you opportunity to minister to one another." Then, when people who have never exercised the gifts before realize that they are in tune with the Lord, just as the leadership is, it will encourage them to share more.

10. The channel for spiritual gifts is ministry. Mark 16:17 points to signs that follow those who believe. As we are active in reaching a world, ministering where God places us, we



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

become usable vessels. Many miracles in Acts happened in the course of everyday life. The Christians were on their way to a temple, to witness, to suffer for Christ's sake. If we care to reach out to people in need, we become bearers of God's gifts, even at unusual times and in unusual situations. The gifts happen when Christians are "on the way" in service for the Lord.

11. Focus on the whole process. Gifts flow through people. What is God doing in their lives? Also, the words are important. What is actually being said? The context is vital. Do the messages shared relate to the life of the church or the flow of that service? The response is important. How are we to receive what has been shared? Always remember: The goal is to build the Church and to win the lost for Christ. The mission of the Church is the number one priority. The gifts are to be seen in the light of the total work God is doing among His people.

When we do not understand the nature and purpose of gifts, we focus on the wrong issues. The question is not primarily what my gifts are, but how to exercise gifts to build the Church. Rather than equate gift manifestation with spirituality, we value and seek the contribution of all, strong or weak. Rather than assuming the gifts are totally supernatural and, therefore, infallible, we must recognize that the gifts are ministered through fallible humans and need to be tested. We grow as we learn how to exercise them. Rather than whether women have a place in public ministry, the question should be proper methodologies of ministry.

Rather than debating which is the greatest or least gift, we need to share God-given gifts in love. A church that ignores the dynamic of Spirit-led ministry misses what God is doing in the world. Providing and modeling the healthy flow of gifts is the biblical alternative to fear of extremes.

If gifts are exercised only in a Sunday service, then they are not essential to the growth of a church. If we focus only on the more spectacular gifts, they are seen as spiritual extras. On the other hand, if we view gifts as an essential element of everyday life, crucial to effective ministry, we can develop a sensitivity to the Spirit that frees us to minister all the gifts. None are spiritual extras that make us superior to others.

The Gospels do not formally conclude. Matthew records the great commission that the Church must yet fulfill under the authority given to Jesus. Mark abruptly concludes, leaving the reader in silent awe and expectation of the powerful, allsufficient Lord who could interrupt any situation, no matter how desperate. Luke-Acts is really 'one integrated whole.' Luke 24 is not the conclusion. The Early Church carried on the mission and work that Christ performed on earth. And Acts does not conclude. John, by including the personal post-Resurrection commission to Peter in John 21, clearly implies the Church will carry on until Jesus returns.

All of Paul's epistles were written to proclaim the Lord's death "until He comes." The gifts of the Spirit were given as a deposit, "a first installment," in anticipation of the full inheritance that the Church shall receive. Hebrews encourages us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Heb. 12:1). Revelation concludes with "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). As has been pointed out, there can be no new revelations given that will supersede or bypass the Bible; at the same time, God continues to speak to and through His Spirit-empowered believers.

Every pastor needs to listen to the Spirit about developing the local assembly in gift ministry. Each assembly must aggressively press into the area of spiritual gifts. Everything that Christians do is their worship to God. He is the audience and our lives are the stage of redemption on which our worship is expressed. The preacher does not labor in the Word to impress his congregation, but to present it as an offering to the Lord. We do not act Christianly toward one another or work in the assembly to impress others with our spirituality and churchmanship; we do it all as an act of worship to God.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

This liberates our ministries. We are no longer bound by the fear of human opinions but seek only to be faithful to our calling in Christ. From the overflow of worship we find God's supernatural enabling. Burnout will be precluded by rest from the Lord and encouragement from other believers. Saints will come alive and get excited. The gifts will flow as part of the normal lifestyle of the assembly to edify and evangelize.

The individuals of such an *ekklēsia* will each be a powerful witness (Acts 1:8), possessed of a deep filial affection for the Lord, fearing lest they should hurt or grieve Him. The demonstration of God's power will be the normal function of their community (Acts 4:33), who will be held in favor and respect by all and to whose company will come a daily increase as souls are saved (Acts 2:47).

Amen! May it be so. May the Church fulfill its potential and touch the world.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Corinthian church went to excess. Ultimately it could have torn itself apart or quenched the ongoing exercise of gifts. Discuss the problems of the Corinthian church's views that would have caused this.

2. What prejudices or past experiences keep churches from moving into spiritual gifts more freely?

3. Paul did not react to Corinthian extremism. Instead, he balanced it and guided it. He wanted a dynamic, free-flowing, Spirit-led church. Discuss how he did this.

4. With every new teaching has come a reaction to that teaching. How can a leader keep people from being so gullible that they accept such teachings? How can one take the best of such teaching rather than simply being reactionary about it?

5. Is your local church clear on its vision, calling, unique direction, and mission? What is it? Be as specific as you can. Are the energies of the members of the assembly focused in that direction? Can you see how the gifts would move your church in that direction?

6. Can any part of your church program function well apart from the Holy Spirit? Do careful soul-searching in this area. If gifts are optional, they will soon become unnecessary.

7. Develop a step-by-step approach for moving your church toward a balanced gift ministry. Then evaluate. For example, why do some steps seem to fail or to lead to a dead end? What is a realistic timetable for achieving an ideal worship and a free flow of gifts?

8. Gifts and fruit of the Spirit must flow together. Discuss what happens when fruit is missing. Discuss how exciting it is when each quality of fruit is manifest along with the gifts.

9. Can you think of times when God moved through you and you perhaps did not realize it was a gift of the Spirit? Describe this experience.

10. Is holiness a prerequisite to exercising the gifts? Why or why not?

11. Discuss whether a person possesses a gift or it is given as the need arises.

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⁸ Lim, D. (2007). [Spiritual Gifts](#). In S. M. Horton (Ed.), *Systematic Theology: Revised Edition* (pp. 457–488). Logion Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 11: Ephesians 4 The Giftings

B. The Variety of Gifts (4:7–10)

4:7 Paul grounds variety within the Church's unity. God has granted a measure of **grace** to each believer as a gift from Christ.

4:8 This verse is an allusion to Ps 68:18. The essence of the Psalm is that a military victor has the right to receive gifts from the people he has conquered and who now are his subjects. Paul suggested that Christ has conquered His enemies (unredeemed sinners) and has given gifts to them, with Paul himself being the perfect example. As Victor over sin and death, Christ gives gifts to His new devoted followers, His captives.

4:9–10 Paul emphasized that the resurrected and exalted Christ now imparts all the fullness of His blessings to the church and to the universe (1:10, 19–23; 3:20–21).

C. The Maturity of the Church (4:11–16)

4:11 The description here is more about gifted people (natural gifts that can be honed and used for the kingdom) than about spiritual gifts (contrast with Paul's meaning in Rom 12; 1 Co 12–14). Five groups of gifted people are listed: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Apostles and prophets are foundational for the church's work (Eph 3:5; see note at 2:20). The term **apostles** primarily refers to people sent with a divine mission or task. They also served as spokesmen for God, bringing new revelation and understanding to the church. **Prophets** revealed God's will to believers for the present (forthtelling) and predicted the future (foretelling). All apostles were prophets, but not all prophets were apostles.

Evangelists were gifted to spread the gospel and plant churches. Evangelists proclaimed the good news in word and deed and instructed others in evangelism. **Pastors** and **teachers** shared similar responsibilities. Pastors provided oversight, comfort, and guidance as the church's shepherds (Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1–4). Teachers instructed and helped apply God's revelation to the life of the church. Teachers were concerned with passing on the church's revealed teachings (1 Co 15:3–4) rather than bringing new inspirational insights like the prophets. Teachers are indispensable for building up the church and are necessary to enable believers to distinguish false doctrine from true teaching.

4:12 The purpose of the gifted people is to equip others to minister. Like many other long sentences in Ephesians, verses 11–16 form one long sentence in the Greek text. The term translated **training** was sometimes used to refer to mending or restoring.

4:13 Ministry is intended to move believers toward accomplishing three goals: (1) unity of faith and full knowledge of God's Son, (2) maturity, and (3) the fullness of Christ. Maturity and unity are measured in terms of the relationship of the body to the Head, Christ.

4:14 When the gifted people equip the church, the community of faith will evidence stability in precept and practice.

4:15 **Speaking the truth in love** can literally be translated "truthing in love." When a church is faithful to speak truth in love, it will have transparent relationships where people edify and benefit one another.

4:16 Ultimately the church will grow up into Christ in all aspects, with each part fitting together and supporting the other. Each member of the body must function properly if the body is to grow. We get our English word harmony from the Greek term translated **fitted and knit together**.⁹

⁹ Dockery, D. S. (2015). [Ephesians](#). In E. R. Clendenen & J. R. Howard (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary* (pp. 1284–1285). Broadman & Holman.

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III. New standards
Ephesians 4:7–5:21

3. Christian unity is enriched by the diversity of our gifts (verses 7–12)

The contrast between verses 6 and 7 is striking. Verse 6 speaks of God as the Father of us *all*, who is above *all*, through *all* and in *all*. Verse 7, however, begins: *But grace was given to each of us* ... Thus Paul turns from ‘**all of us**’ to ‘**each of us**’, and so from the unity to the diversity of the church.

[HOW THE INDIVIDUAL IS A PUZZLE PIECE IN THE US/UNITY] [UNITY DOES NOT MEAN SAMENESS]

He is, in fact, deliberately qualifying what he has just written about the church’s unity. Although there is only one body, one faith and one family, this unity is not to be misconstrued as a lifeless or colourless uniformity. We are not to imagine that every Christian is an exact replica of every other, as if we had all been mass-produced in some celestial factory. On the contrary, the unity of the church, far from being boringly monotonous, is exciting in its diversity. This is not just because of our different cultures, temperaments and personalities (which, though true, is not Paul’s point here), but because of the different gifts which **Christ distributes for the enrichment of our common life**.

Verse 7 refers to Christ’s *grace* in bestowing different gifts. Although Paul does not here employ the term *charismata* for ‘gifts’ (as he does in Rom. 12:6 and 1 Cor. 12:4), yet clearly it is to these that he is referring. For ‘grace’ is *charis*, and ‘gifts’ are *charismata*. Moreover, it is very important to understand the difference between them. ‘Saving grace’, the grace which saves sinners, is given to all who believe; but what might be termed ‘service grace’, the grace which equips God’s people to serve, is given in differing degrees *according to the measure of Christ’s gift* (verse 7). The unity of the church is due to *charis*, God’s grace having reconciled us to himself; but the diversity of the church is due to *charismata*, God’s gifts distributed to church members.

It is, of course, from this word *charismata* that the adjective ‘charismatic’ is derived. The so-called ‘charismatic movement’, although controversial in a number of its distinctive emphases, has without doubt been used by God to bring spiritual renewal to many churches and individual Christians. Nevertheless, we should register a biblical protest against the designation ‘charismatic movement’, whether its adherents themselves chose it or were given it. ‘Charismatic’ is not a term which can be accurately applied to any group or movement within the church, since according to the New Testament the whole church is a charismatic community. It is the body of Christ, every single member of which has a gift (*charisma*) to exercise or function to perform.

What, then, does this paragraph teach us about *charismata* or spiritual gifts? It tells us about their giver, their character and their purpose.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

a. *The giver of spiritual gifts is the ascended Christ (verses 7–10)*

According to verse 7 each gift is Christ's gift, and this truth is now enforced in the following verse by a quotation from **Psalm 68:18: *When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.***

Psalm 68 is a call to God to come to the rescue of his people and vindicate them again, as in olden days. For he went in triumph before his people after the exodus (verse 7), so that Mount Sinai trembled (verse 8) and kings were scattered (verses 11–14). **Then, desiring Mount Zion as his abode (verse 16), he came from Sinai to his holy place (verse 17) and ascended the high mount, leading captives in his train. It is all very vivid imagery. It seems that the transfer of the ark to Zion is likened to the triumphant march of Yahweh into his capital.**

Paul applies this picture to Christ's ascension, not arbitrarily because he detected a vague analogy between the two, but justifiably because he saw in the exaltation of Jesus a further fulfilment of this description of the triumph of God. Christ ascended as conqueror to the Father's right hand, his train of captives being the principalities and powers he had defeated, dethroned and disarmed.

In the application of Psalm 68:18 to Christ, however, there is a textual problem. For the Psalm reads that God ascended the mount, 'receiving gifts among men', whereas Paul's quotation is that Christ 'gave gifts to men'. Some commentators do not hesitate to say that Paul changed the wording to suit his purpose. For example, J. H. Houlden writes: 'There is no need to suppose that the alteration was other than deliberate.' Others think it was 'an unintentional misquotation'.⁹ Because of the apostle's known regard for Scripture both these explanations seem *a priori* unlikely.

The place to begin an explanation is surely to see that the two renderings are only formally but not substantially contradictory. **Words cannot be interpreted by themselves, but only in context. So we need to remember that after every conquest in the ancient world there was invariably both a receiving of tribute and a distributing of largesse. What conquerors took from their captives, they gave away to their own people. The spoils were divided, the booty was shared. It seems possible that the Hebrew text itself may imply this, since the verb could be translated 'brought' rather than 'received', and it is not without significance that two ancient versions or translations, one Aramaic and the other Syriac, render it 'gave'. So evidently this was already a traditional interpretation.**

One other interesting point needs to be made. **Liturgical custom in the synagogues associated Psalm 68 with Pentecost, the Jewish feast commemorating the giving of the law. Paul's use of it in reference to the Christian Pentecost then makes a remarkable analogy.** As Moses received the law and gave it to Israel, so Christ received the Spirit and gave him to his people in order to write God's law in their hearts and through the pastors he appointed (verse 11) to teach them the truth. This whole argument that 'receiving' and 'giving' belong indissolubly to each other is aptly illustrated in Acts 2:33 where Peter on the day of Pentecost said: 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit; he (*sc.* Jesus) has poured out this which you see and hear'. Christ could only give the gift he had received.

After the quotation from Psalm 68:18 Paul adds in parenthesis that Christ's having *ascended* into heaven implies that ***he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth (verse 9)***. Because of the immediate context, which concerns the gifts of Christ to his church following his ascension, G. B. Caird makes the novel suggestion that his 'descent' was his 'return at Pentecost to give his Spirit to the church'. **But, ingenious as this is, the natural interpretation of the words suggests**

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

that his descent preceded his ascent rather than followed it. The early fathers understood this as a reference to his descent into hades.³ They associated it with **1 Peter 3:19** ('he went and preached to the spirits in prison') which they interpreted as his spoiling or 'harrowing' hell. But, whatever the 1 Peter text means, there is no obvious reference to hades or hell in Ephesians 4:9. Calvin (followed by Reformed commentators like Charles Hodge) argued from the 'ascended into heaven' of John 3:13 that 'the lower parts of the earth' is a genitive of apposition or definition, that what it means is simply 'the earth', and that Christ's descent refers to his incarnation. NEB takes it this way too, namely that he descended 'to the lowest level, down to the very earth'. Perhaps, however, the reference is more general still, namely that Christ descended to the depths of humiliation when he came to earth. Or possibly the allusion is to the cross, and 'to the experience of the nethermost depths, the very agonies of hell'⁴ which Christ endured there.

Such an interpretation would fit well with Philippians 2:5–11, where 'even death on a cross' describes his deepest humiliation, which was followed by his supreme exaltation. This was 'far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named' according to 1:21, and here 'far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things' (verse 10), or 'so that he might fill the universe' (NEB). **What is in Paul's mind, therefore, is not so much descent and ascent in spatial terms, but rather humiliation and exaltation, the latter bringing Christ universal authority and power, as a result of which he bestowed on the church he rules both, the Spirit himself to indwell it and the gifts of the Spirit to edify it or bring it to maturity.**

In the light of this emphasis on Christ, ascended, exalted, filling the universe, ruling the church, bestowing gifts, it would clearly be a mistake to think of *charismata* as being exclusively 'gifts of the Spirit' and to associate them too closely with the Holy Spirit or with experiences of the Holy Spirit. For here they are the gifts of Christ, while in Romans 12 they are the gifts of God the Father. It is always misleading to separate the three Persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Together they are involved in every aspect of the church's wellbeing.

***b. The character of spiritual gifts is extremely varied.* [NOT SURE I AGREE WITH THE ENTIRE THOUGHT PROCESS AND APPLICATION STOTT USES. DR. HAYFORD WOULD OUTLINE THIS SET OF GIFTS AS VOCATIONAL. IT IS NOT WRAPPED IN WITH THE CHARISMATA GIFTS (1 CORINTHIANS) NOR THE MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS (ROMANS).**

Paul specifically says so in 1 Cor. 12:4: 'Now there are varieties of gifts'. It is important to recall this because many today have a very restricted view of *charismata*. For example, some people speak and write of 'the nine gifts of the Spirit', presumably to make a neat but artificial parallel with the Spirit's ninefold fruit. Others seem to be pre-occupied, even obsessed, with only three of the more spectacular gifts ('tongues', 'prophecy' and 'healing'). In fact, however, the five lists given in the New Testament mention between them at least twenty distinct gifts, some of which are very prosaic and unsensational (like 'doing acts of mercy', Rom. 12:8). Moreover, each list diverges widely from the others, and gives its selection of gifts in an apparently haphazard fashion. This suggests not only that no one list is complete, but that even all five together do not represent an exhaustive catalogue. Doubtless there are many more which are unlisted.

In our text Paul selects only five for mention. **Christ (*autos*, 'he', is emphatic, verse 11) gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.** The word 'apostle' has three main meanings in the New Testament. Once only it seems to be applied to every individual Christian, when Jesus said: 'A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

who is sent (*apostolos*) greater than he who sent him.’ So every Christian is both a servant and an apostle. The verb *apostellō* means to ‘send’, and all Christian people are sent out into the world as Christ’s ambassadors and witnesses, to share in the apostolic mission of the whole church. This cannot be the meaning here, however, for in this sense all Christians are ‘apostles’, whereas Paul writes that Christ gave only ‘some’ to be apostles.

Secondly, there were ‘apostles of the churches’, messengers sent out by a church either as missionaries or on some other errand. And thirdly there were the ‘apostles of Christ’, a very small and distinctive group, consisting of the Twelve (including Matthias who replaced Judas), Paul, James the Lord’s brother, and possibly one or two others. They were personally chosen and authorized by Jesus, and had to be eyewitnesses of the risen Lord.⁹ It must be in this sense that Paul is using the word ‘apostles’ here, for he puts them at the top of his list, as he does also in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (‘first apostles’), and this is how he has so far used the word in his letter, referring to himself (1:1) and to his fellow apostles as the foundation of the church and the organs of revelation (2:20; 3:21).

We should not hesitate, therefore, to say that *in this sense* there are no apostles today. In 1975 John Noble wrote and published a booklet entitled *First Apostles, Last Apostles*. In it his concern is ‘to arouse my fellow Christians to look for apostles to shape church life in our day’, who will ‘unite and release an army under God which will accomplish his purpose in these end-times’. His reading of history is that when the original apostles died, ‘they left a vacuum of authority into which the wrong men stepped’, *i.e.* the bishops. He criticizes both Catholicism and Protestantism, the former for ‘investing absolute authority in one man’ and the latter for ‘giving every individual the right to rule in the church’. We can certainly agree with him that throughout the long and chequered history of the church there have been many misuses of authority, but he misses in his exposition the vitally important truths **(1) that the original apostles as eyewitnesses of the historic risen Jesus can in the nature of the case have no successors, and (2) that their authority is preserved today in the New Testament, which is the essential ‘apostolic succession’**. Once we have insisted, however, that there are today no apostles of Christ with an authority comparable to that of the apostles Paul, Peter and John, it is certainly possible to argue that there are people with **apostolic ministries of a different kind**, including episcopal jurisdiction, pioneer missionary work, church planting, itinerant leadership, *etc.*

What about *prophets*? Here again it is necessary to make a distinction. In the primary sense in which the Bible uses the word, **a prophet was a person who ‘stood in the council of God’, who heard and even ‘saw’ his word, and who in consequence ‘spoke from the mouth of the Lord’ and spoke his word ‘faithfully’**. In other words, a prophet was a mouthpiece or spokesman of God, a vehicle of his direct revelation. *In this sense* we must again insist that there are no prophets today. Nobody can presume to claim an inspiration comparable to that of the canonical prophets, or use their introductory formula ‘Thus says the Lord’. If this were possible, we would have to add their words to Scripture, and the whole church would need to listen and obey. Yet this is the sense in which Paul appears to be using the word here. He puts the prophets next after the apostles (as in 1 Cor. 12:28; ‘second prophets’), and he brackets ‘apostles and prophets’ as the church’s foundation and the recipients of fresh revelation from God (2:20; 3:6). As the foundation on which the church is being built the prophets have no successors, any more than the apostles have, for the foundation was laid and finished centuries ago and we cannot tamper with it in any way today.

But, as with apostles so with prophets, having first established the uniqueness of the original teachers of the church, we then have to ask if there is a subsidiary gift of some kind. It seems right to answer ‘yes’, but then to confess that we do not know for certain what it is! Some see it as a

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

special gift of biblical exposition, an unusual degree of insight into the Word of God, so that by the ministry of the Holy Spirit modern ‘prophets’ hear and receive the Word of God, not however as a new revelation but as a fresh understanding of the old. Others see it as a sensitive understanding of the contemporary world, a reading of the signs of the times, together with an indignant denunciation of the social sins of the day and a perceptive application of Scripture to them. Those who hold this view draw attention to the socio-political oracles of the Old Testament prophets. A third view concentrates on the effect which the ministry of New Testament prophets had on their listeners, bringing to unbelievers a conviction of sin and to believers ‘upbuilding and encouragement and consolation’. In these three views the ‘prophetic’ gift is detected in the handling of the Word of God, for one cannot think of God’s prophets in isolation from God’s Word. It is understood as a gift of insight into either the biblical text or the contemporary situation, or both, namely a powerful combination of accurate exposition and pertinent application.

There is another view, however, popularized by ‘pentecostal’ and ‘charismatic’ Christians, namely that God is again raising up prophets and prophetesses today, who speak his word in his name and by his direct inspiration. I have to confess my own grave hesitation about this claim. Those who make it seldom seem to recognize either the uniqueness of the original apostles and prophets or the superfluity of successors once the New Testament Scriptures became available to the church. Besides, there have been many similar claims in the history of the church, which do not encourage one’s confidence in the modern phenomenon. In those churches in which the possibility of such a gift is accepted, however, it is important to insist that so-called ‘prophetic utterances’ could never be of more than local and limited value (to individuals or a particular congregation, not the whole church), that they must always be carefully tested by Scripture and by the known character of the speaker, and that the regular, systematic, thoughtful exposition of the Bible is much more important for the building up of the people of God.

After apostles and prophets Paul mentions *evangelists*. **This noun occurs only three times in the New Testament (here, in Acts 21:8 of Philip and in 2 Tim. 4:5 of Timothy himself)**, although of course the verb ‘to evangelize’ is frequently used to describe the spreading of the gospel. Since all Christians are under obligation, when they have an appropriate opportunity, to bear witness to Christ and his good news, the gift of an ‘evangelist’ (bestowed only upon some) must be something different. It may refer to the gift of evangelistic preaching, or of making the gospel particularly plain and relevant to unbelievers, or of helping timorous people to take the plunge of commitment to Christ, or of effective personal witnessing. Probably the gift of an evangelist may take all these different forms and more. It must relate in some way to an evangelistic ministry, whether in mass evangelism, personal evangelism, literature evangelism, film evangelism, radio and television evangelism, musical evangelism or in the use of some other medium. There is a great need for gifted evangelists today who will pioneer new ways of exercising and developing their gift, so as to penetrate the vast unreached segments of society for Christ.

Since the definite article is not repeated in the expression *some pastors and teachers*, it may be that these are two names for the same ministry. Calvin did not think so, for he suggested that the administration of discipline, the sacraments, warning and exhortation belonged particularly to pastors. Yet it is clear that ‘pastors’ (that is, ‘shepherds’), who are called to ‘tend’ God’s flock, do so in particular by ‘feeding it’, *i.e.* by teaching. Perhaps one should say that, although every pastor must be a teacher, gifted in the ministry of God’s Word to people (whether a congregation or groups or individuals), yet not every Christian teacher is also a pastor (since he may be teaching only in a school or college rather than in a local church).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Looking back, we observe that all five gifts relate in some way to the ministry of teaching. Although there are neither apostles nor prophets in the original sense today, there are evangelists to preach the gospel, pastors to tend the flock, and teachers to expound the word. Indeed, they are urgently needed. Nothing is more necessary for the building up of God's church in every age than an ample supply of God-gifted teachers. Yet I wonder if this need has ever been greater than it is in our own day. In some areas of the third world great 'people movements' are taking place. Large numbers, in some cases whole villages and tribes, are accepting Christ, and the church growth rate exceeds the population growth rate. This exciting fact brings with it both problems and dangers, however. The newly baptized converts are spiritual babies. As such they are prone to sin and error, and almost defenceless against false teaching. Above all else they need teaching from the Word of God. In some situations, believe it or not, missionaries are calling for a moratorium on converts. 'For heaven's sake', they pray to God, 'don't give us any more, for we don't know what to do with the thousands we already have.' I sometimes urge my charismatic friends, therefore, some of whom seem to me to be preoccupied with the less important gifts, to remember Paul's dictum 'earnestly to desire the higher gifts', and to consider whether these are not the teaching gifts. It is teaching which builds up the church. It is teachers who are needed most.

Another important question is raised by this verse (11). There is no mention in it of presbyters or deacons (to whom reference is made, for example, in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:1, 12), still less of the threefold order 'bishops, presbyters and deacons' which came to be developed in the second century and is widely acknowledged in Christendom today. How should we account for their omission here? Is this just an earlier stage before the more developed situation reflected in the Pastoral Epistles? Alternatively, should we distinguish between an 'institutional' ministry appointed by the church ('bishops, presbyters and deacons') and a 'charismatic' ministry appointed by Christ ('apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers')? No, neither of these explanations should commend itself to us. To separate the 'institutional' from the 'charismatic', or ministerial 'order' from ministerial 'gifts', is a false distinction and a disastrous one. That there is such a thing by God's intention as an institutional ministry or a ministerial order (whether threefold or twofold does not matter for our purposes here) is clear from the Pastoral Epistles. Timothy was to select and ordain presbyters and deacons for every church. But how would he select them? What were to be their qualifications? Partly he was to assure himself of the integrity of their moral character, partly of their doctrinal orthodoxy, and partly of their gifts (*e.g.* 'an apt teacher', *didaktikos*). It is inconceivable that the church should select, train and ordain people who lack the appropriate God-given gifts. Ordination to the pastoral ministry of any church should signify at least (1) the public recognition that God has called and gifted the person concerned, and (2) the public authorization of this person to obey the call and exercise the gift, with prayer for the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit. So we must not separate what God has united. On the one hand, the church should acknowledge the gifts which God has given people, and should publicly authorize them and encourage their exercise in ministry. On the other, the New Testament never contemplates the grotesque situation in which the church commissions and authorizes people to exercise a ministry for which they lack both the divine call and the divine equipment. No, gift and office, divine enabling and ecclesiastical commissioning, belong together. It seems to me that Paul indicates this by numbering 'pastors and teachers' among Christ's gifts to his church, since the work of ordained presbyters is precisely to shepherd and teach Christ's flock. 'They therefore are insane', writes Calvin without mincing his words, 'who, neglecting this means (*sc.* of building up the church), hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with fanatics who pretend to secret

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

revelations of the Spirit, and the proud, who content themselves with the private reading of the Scripture, and imagine they do not need the ministry of the Church.’

c. *The purpose of spiritual gifts is service.* [NOT SURE I AGREE WITH THE ENTIRE THOUGHT PROCESS AND APPLICATION STOTT USES. DR. HAYFORD WOULD OUTLINE THIS SET OF GIFTS AS VOCATIONAL. IT IS NOT WRAPPED IN WITH THE CHARISMATA GIFTS (1 CORINTHIANS) NOR THE MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS (ROMANS)].

In verse 12 Paul states clearly **why** Christ gave these gifts to his church. The RSV first edition (1946) read: *for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*. It will be noted that according to this translation, Christ had three distinct purposes in mind. I think Armitage Robinson was the first commentator to insist that this was a mistake. ‘The second of these clauses’, he wrote, ‘must be taken as dependent on the first, and not ... as coordinate with it.’ In other words, the first comma (‘the fatal comma’⁸)—which is ‘without linguistic authority but with undoubted ecclesiological bias’—must be erased. If it is allowed to stand, we are faced with ‘a saddening result’, for ‘the verse then means that only the special ministers, not all the saints, are called to do “the work of ministry” and to cooperate in the “building of the body”.’ This interpretation ‘has an aristocratic, that is, a clerical and ecclesiastical flavour, it distinguishes the (mass of the) “saints” from the (superior class of the) officers of the church’.¹

If the comma is erased, however, we are left with two purposes—one immediate and the other ultimate—for which Christ gave gifts to his church. His immediate purpose was ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry’ (RSV second edition 1971) or better ‘to equip God’s people for work in his service’ (NEB), and his ultimate purpose ‘for building up the body of Christ’.

The former expression about equipping God’s people is of far-reaching significance for any true understanding of Christian ministry. For the word *ministry* (*diakonia*) is here used not to describe the work of pastors but rather the work of so-called laity, that is, of all God’s people without exception. Here is incontrovertible evidence that the New Testament envisages ministry not as the prerogative of a clerical élite but as the privileged calling of all the people of God. Thank God that in our generation this biblical vision of an ‘every-member ministry’ is taking a firm hold in the church.

It does not mean that there is no distinctive pastoral ministry left for clergy; rather it establishes its character. The New Testament concept of the pastor is not of a person who jealously guards all ministry in his own hands, and successfully squashes all lay initiatives, but of one who helps and encourages all God’s people to discover, develop and exercise their gifts. His teaching and training are directed to this end, to enable the people of God to be a servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts in a world of alienation and pain. Thus, instead of monopolizing all ministry himself, he actually multiplies ministries.

What model of the church, then, should we keep in our minds? The traditional model is that of the pyramid, with the pastor perched precariously on its pinnacle, like a little pope in his own church, while the laity are arrayed beneath him in serried ranks of inferiority. It is a totally unbiblical image, because the New Testament envisages not a single pastor with a docile flock but both a plural oversight and an every-member ministry. Not much better is the model of the bus, in which the pastor does all the driving while the congregation are the passengers slumbering in peaceful security behind him. Quite different from either the pyramid or the bus is the biblical model of the body. The church is the body of Christ, every member of which has a distinctive

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

function. Although the body metaphor can certainly accommodate the concept of a distinct pastorate (in terms of one ministry—and a very important one—among many), there is simply no room in it either for a hierarchy or for that kind of bossy clericalism which concentrates all ministry in the hands of one man and denies the people of God their own rightful ministries.

I saw the principle of the every-member ministry well illustrated when I visited St Paul's Church, Darien, Connecticut, a few years ago. It is an American Episcopal church, which has been influenced by the charismatic movement. On the front cover of their Sunday bulletin I read the name of the Rector, the Reverend Everett Fullam, then the names of the Associate Rector and of the Assistant to the Rector. Next came the following line: 'Ministers: the entire congregation'. It was startling, but undeniably biblical.

So Christ's immediate purpose in the giving of pastors and teachers to his church is through their ministry of the word to equip all his people for their varied ministries. And the ultimate purpose of this is to build up his body, the church. For clearly the way the whole body grows is for all its members to use their God-given gifts. These gifts are so beneficial both to those who exercise their ministry faithfully and to those who receive it that the church becomes steadily more healthy and mature. If the sixteenth century recovered 'the priesthood of all believers' (every Christian enjoying through Christ a direct access to God), perhaps the twentieth century will recover 'the ministry of all believers' (every Christian receiving from Christ a privileged ministry to men).

All spiritual gifts, then, are service-gifts. This is their purpose. They are not given for selfish but for unselfish use, namely for the service of other people. Each of the lists of *charismata* in the New Testament emphasizes this. 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good'. It follows that their comparative importance (Paul is quite clear that some are 'higher' or 'greater' than others)³ is to be assessed by the degree to which they 'edify' or build up the church. This is why the teaching gifts are of paramount importance, for nothing builds up the church like the truth of God's Word.

To recapitulate, we have seen that it is the exalted Christ who bestows gifts on his church, that his gifts are very diverse in character, that the teaching gifts are primary, and that their purpose is to equip God's people for their ministries and so build up Christ's body.

4. Christian unity demands the maturity of our **growth** (verses 13–16)

The apostle goes on to elaborate what he means by *building up the body of Christ*. It will evidently be a lengthy process, leading (in three pregnant phrases) to *the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, mature manhood, and the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. This is the goal to which the church will one day *attain*.

Because this verb *attain* means literally 'to come to meet' (*katantaō*), and because the first and third phrases refer explicitly to the Lord Jesus ('Son of God' and 'Christ'), Markus Barth interprets the second ('mature manhood') as referring to him too. He translates it 'the Perfect Man' and pictures the church as the bride of Christ going out in a joyful festival procession to meet her Bridegroom at his triumphant appearing. It is an attractive reconstruction, and certainly accords with the development of the bride and bridegroom imagery of 5:25–27. On the other hand, it seems somewhat forced, since what we are said to 'attain' or 'meet' is not simply 'the Son of God' but 'the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God', not simply 'Christ' but 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. In other words, the church's goal is not Christ but its own maturity in unity which comes from knowing, trusting and growing up into Christ.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

We pause to note that the church's unity, although already in one sense given and inviolable, as we have seen, yet needs in another sense to be both 'maintained' (verse 3) and 'attained' (verse 13). Both verbs are surprising. If unity already exists as a gift, how can it be attained as a goal? Probably we need to reply that just as unity needs to be maintained *visibly*, so it needs to be attained *fully*. **For there are degrees of unity, just as there are degrees of sanctity.** And the unity to which we are to come one day is that full unity which a full faith in and knowledge of the Son of God will make possible. This expression effectively disposes of the argument that unity can grow without Christian faith or knowledge. On the contrary, it is precisely the more we know and trust the Son of God that we grow in the kind of unity with one another which he desires.

This full unity is also called *mature manhood*. Some interpret this individually of each Christian growing into maturity in Christ, which is certainly a New Testament concept. But the context seems to demand that we understand it corporately. The church is represented as a single organism, the body of Christ, and is to grow up into adult stature. Indeed, Paul has referred to it as the new humanity which God is creating, or as 'one new man' (2:15). To the oneness and the newness of this 'man' he now adds matureness. The *one new man* is to attain *mature manhood*, which will be nothing less than *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*, the fullness which Christ himself possesses and bestows.

Although it seems that this growth into maturity is a corporate concept, describing the church as a whole, yet it clearly depends on the maturing of its individual members, as Paul proceeds to say: *so that we may no longer be children* (verse 14). Of course we are to resemble children in their humility and innocence, but not in their ignorance or instability. Unstable children are like little boats in a stormy sea, entirely at the mercy of wind and waves. Paul paints a graphic picture, tossed to and fro (*klydōnizomenoi*, from *klydōn*, rough water or surf) meaning 'tossed here and there by waves' (AG) and *carried about* (*peripheromenoi*) meaning 'swung round by shifting winds'. Apparently Plato used this latter word of tops, which led E. K. Simpsom to dub such people 'whirligigs'.⁷ NEB brings the two storm pictures together by translating 'tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching'. Such are immature Christians. They never seem to know their own mind or come to settled convictions. Instead, their opinions tend to be those of the last preacher they heard or the last book they read, and they fall an easy prey to each new theological fad. They cannot resist *the cunning of men* (*kybia* means 'dice-playing' and so 'trickery') or *their craftiness in deceitful wiles*.

In contrast to **doctrinal instability, which is a mark of immaturity, we should be speaking the truth in love** in order that we may *grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love* (verses 15–16)

We must not look in these verses for inspired instruction on human anatomy and physiology. The apostle's intention is not to teach us how the human body works, but rather how the body of Christ grows. True, he uses some terms employed by ancient Greek medical writers like Hippocrates and Galen. 'We can almost see him turn to "the beloved physician", of whose presence he tells us in the companion epistle (Col. 4:14), before venturing to speak—technical language of "every ligament of the whole apparatus" of the human frame.' But his emphasis is on the head 'into' whom we are to grow up (verse 15) and 'from' whom the body grows when 'each part is working properly'. Markus Barth brings out clearly in his translation this focusing of attention on the initiative and work of the Head, Christ: 'He is at work fitting and joining the whole body together. He provides sustenance to it through every contact according to the needs of each single part. He enables the body to make its own growth so that it builds itself up in love.'

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

If now we drop the body metaphor and enquire exactly how the church grows into maturity, Paul is ready with his answer. **It grows by truth and love.** To allow ourselves to be hurled hither and thither by the fierce blasts of false teaching is to condemn ourselves and the church to perpetual immaturity (verse 14). Instead, what we need is ‘the truth’, provided we speak it ‘in love’ (verse 15). For it is ‘in love’ that the church grows and builds itself up (verse 16). What Paul calls for is a balanced combination of the two. **‘Speaking the truth in love’ is not the best rendering of his expression, for the Greek verb makes no reference to our speech. Literally, it means, ‘truthing (*alētheuontes*) in love’, and includes the notions of ‘maintaining’, ‘living’ and ‘doing’ the truth.** Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God’s revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself ‘the Spirit of truth’, and his firstfruit is ‘love’. There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity.

Conclusion

Here, then, is Paul’s vision for the church. God’s new society is to display charity, unity, diversity and growing maturity. These are the characteristics of ‘a life worthy of the calling’ to which God has called us, and which the apostle begs us to lead (verse 1).

The more we share Paul’s perspective, the deeper will be our discontent with the ecclesiastical *status quo*. Some of us are too conservative, too complacent, too ready to acquiesce in the present situation and to resist change. Others are too radical, wanting to dispense with the institution altogether. Instead we need to grasp more clearly the kind of new society God wants his church to be. Then we shall not be content either with things as they are, or with partial solutions, but rather will pray and work for the church’s total renewal.

Some look mainly for structures of unity, but seem to have no comparable concern that the church should become a truly caring community marked by humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance and love. Paul’s primary concern is not for structures; he begins and ends with love (verses 2, 16).

Others lay great stress on the fact of the church’s unity as a theological concept clearly articulated in their minds, but appear to see nothing anomalous in the visible disunity which contradicts their theology.

Others are content with a uniformity of church life and liturgy which is dull, boring, colourless, monotonous and dead; they have never glimpsed the variety God intends or the diversity of ministries which should enrich and enliven their membership of the body of Christ.

Others have a static view of the church, and are well satisfied if the congregation manages to maintain its size and programme, without cutback; they have no vision of church growth either by evangelistic outreach or by the Christian maturing of their members.

All such complacency is unworthy of the church’s calling. In contrast to it the apostle sets before us the picture of a deepening fellowship, an eagerness to maintain visible Christian unity and to recover if it is lost, an active every-member ministry and a steady growth into maturity by

holding the truth in love. We need to keep this biblical ideal clearly before us. Only then shall we live a life that is worthy of it.

8. A new set of clothes

4:17–5:4

The apostle continues to describe the new standards which are expected of God's new society, or the life which is worthy of God's call. Called to be 'one' people, he has argued, we must cultivate unity. Called to be a 'holy' people, he goes on to argue now, we must also cultivate purity. Purity is as indispensable a characteristic of the people of God as unity.

Paul opens this section on the church's purity, just as he opened the former section on the church's unity, with an assertion of his authority as an apostle of Christ.

Verse 1 *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you ...*

Verse 17 *Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord ...*

The phrase *in the Lord* means 'in the Lord's name' (GNB). He is making the solemn claim that he writes to them with the authority of the Lord Jesus. NIV brings out this emphasis: 'I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord.'

The gist of his message is plain: *you must no longer live as the Gentiles do*. He is generalizing of course. Not all pagans were (or are) as dissolute as those he is about to portray. Yet just as there is a typical Christian life, so there is a typical pagan life. When each life is true to its own principles, it is fundamentally opposed to the other. His readers knew from experience what he was saying; for they had been pagans themselves, and they were still living in a pagan environment. But they must live that way *no longer*, even if all around them others continued to do so (*as the Gentiles do*). Once they were pagans and so lived like pagans; now they were Christians and must live like Christians. They had become different people; they must behave differently. Their new status as God's new society involved new standards, and their new life in Christ a new lifestyle.

The way Paul handles his theme is to begin with the doctrinal basis of the new life (4:17–24), and then move on to its practical outworking in everyday behaviour (4:25–5:4).

1. The doctrinal basis (4:17–24)

It was essential at the outset for his readers to grasp the contrast between what they had been as pagans and what they now were as Christians, between their old and their new life, and further to grasp the underlying theological basis of this change.

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; ¹⁸ they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; ¹⁹ they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness. ²⁰ You did not so learn Christ!—²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. ²² Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

and is corrupt through deceitful lusts,²³ and be renewed in the spirit of your minds,²⁴ and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

What is immediately noteworthy is the apostle's emphasis on the intellectual factor in everybody's way of life. While describing pagans, he draws attention to *the futility of their minds*, adds that they are *darkened in their understanding* and attributes their alienation from God to *the ignorance that is in them*. He thus refers to their empty minds, darkened understanding and inward ignorance, as a result of which they had become callous, licentious and insatiably unclean. But in contrast to them the believers had 'learned' Christ, 'heard' him, been 'taught' in him, all according to the 'truth' which is in Jesus. Over against the darkness and ignorance of the heathen Paul thus sets the truth of Christ which the Christians had learned. Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to the power of ignorance and error to corrupt, and the power of truth to liberate, ennoble and refine.

a. The pagan life (verses 17–19)

But what is the origin of the darkness of heathen minds, when God himself is light, and he is continuously speaking to mankind through his creation, and both heaven and earth declare his glory? It is *due to their hardness of heart*, says Paul. The word he uses is *pōrōsis*, and on its derivation and history Armitage Robinson supplies a long additional note. *Pōros* was 'a kind of marble' or in medical writers a 'callus' or a 'bony formation on the joints'. Hence the verb *pōroun* meant to petrify, to become hard and therefore insensible, and even (when 'transferred from the organs of feeling to the organ of sight') blind. But in his view it does not mean 'stubbornness'. It is rather 'intellectual obtuseness, not the steeling of the will'. He examines the eight New Testament occurrences of the word and then concludes: 'Obtuseness, or a dulling of the faculty of perception equivalent to moral blindness, always gives an appropriate sense. On the other hand, the context never decisively favours the meaning "hardness", and this meaning seems sometimes quite out of place.' So he opts for 'blindness', as does the AV in this verse, as 'the least misleading' rendering.

Despite the careful arguing of his case, however, Armitage Robinson has not carried the translators and commentators with him. Certainly Mark 3:5 (where Jesus 'looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart') seems to imply a wilful obtuseness. Coming back to our Ephesians text, NEB translates it 'their minds have grown hard as stone', GNB uses the word 'stubborn', and J. H. Houlden comments: 'Pagan immorality is seen as wilful and culpable . . ., the result of their deliberate refusal of the moral light available to them in their own thought and conscience.' It is true that in biblical usage 'heart' and 'mind' cannot be separated, since the heart includes our capacity to think and understand. Nevertheless, there is a real distinction between 'ignorance' and 'hardness' or 'obstinacy'.

If we put Paul's expressions together, noting carefully their logical connections (especially *because of* and *due to*, both translating *dia*), he seems to be depicting the terrible downward path of evil, which begins with an obstinate rejection of God's known truth. First comes *their hardness of heart*, then *their ignorance*, being *darkened in their understanding*, next and consequently they are *alienated from the life of God*, since he turns away from them, until finally *they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness*. NEB has 'They stop at nothing to satisfy their foul desire'. Thus hardness of heart leads first to darkness of mind, then to deadness of soul under the judgment of God, and finally to recklessness of life. Having lost all sensitivity, people lose all self-control. It is exactly the

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

sequence which Paul elaborates in the latter part of Romans 1. Comparative tables may help to demonstrate this:

Romans 1:18–32

Ephesians 4:17–19

Stage 1: Obstinacy

18 *‘Men ... by their wickedness suppress the truth’*

21 *‘Although they knew God they did not honour him as God’*

28 *‘They did not see fit to acknowledge God’*

Stage 2: Darkness

21 *‘They became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened’*

22 *‘They became fools’*

28 *‘A base mind’*

18a *‘They are darkened in their understanding’*

18b *‘The ignorance that is in them’*

Stage 3: Death or judgment

24 *‘Therefore God gave them up’*

26 *‘For this reason God gave them up’*

28 *‘God gave them up’*

18 *‘They are ... alienated from the life of God’*

Stage 4: Recklessness

God gave them up to—

24 *‘Impurity’*

26 *‘Dishonourable passions’*

27 *‘Shameless acts’*

28 *‘Improper conduct’*

29–31 *‘All manner of wickedness ...’*

19 *‘They have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness (aselgeia, meaning public indecency of a shameless kind), greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness’*

b. *The Christian life (verses 20–24)*

The RSV does not adequately bring out the sharpness of the contrast, the ‘but as for you’ (*humeis de*) or ‘you, however’ (NIV) of the beginning of verse 20: *you did not so learn Christ!* Over against heathen hardness, darkness and recklessness Paul sets a whole process of Christian moral education. He uses three parallel expressions which centre on three verbs, all in the aorist tense, meaning to ‘learn’, to ‘hear’ and to ‘be taught’, with a final reference to ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

First, ‘you learned Christ’ (verse 20, *emathete*)

Secondly, ‘you heard him’ (verse 21a, *ēkousate*)

Thirdly, ‘you were taught in him’ (verse 21b, *edidachthēte*)

These are remarkable expressions. They ‘evoke the image of a school’ and refer to the catechetical instruction which Paul assumes, indeed knows; they have had. According to the first, Christ is himself the substance of Christian teaching. Just as evangelists ‘preach Christ’,⁵ so their hearers ‘learn’ Christ, and ‘receive’ him, that is, a tradition about him. But what sort of Christ do they learn? Not just the Word made flesh, the unique Godman, who died, rose and reigns. More than that. The implication of the context is that we must also preach his lordship, the kingdom or rule of righteousness he ushered in, and all the moral demands of the new life. The Christ whom the Ephesians had learned was calling them to standards and values totally at variance with their former pagan life.

Secondly, Christ who is the substance of the teaching (‘you learned Christ’) is himself also the teacher (‘you heard him’). It is a pity that RSV translates the phrase *you heard about him*, for there is no preposition. Paul assumes that through the voice of their Christian teachers, they had actually heard Christ’s voice. Thus, when sound biblical moral instruction is being given, it may be said that Christ is teaching about Christ.

Thirdly, they had been *taught in him*. That is to say, Jesus Christ, in addition to being the teacher and the teaching, was also the context, even the atmosphere within which the teaching was given. When Jesus Christ is at once the subject, the object and the environment of the moral instruction being given, we may have confidence that it is truly Christian. For *truth is in Jesus*. The change from his title ‘Christ’ to his human name ‘Jesus’ seems to be deliberate. The historical Jesus is himself the embodiment of truth, as he claimed.

But what exactly is this truth that is in Jesus? If heathen darkness leads to reckless uncleanness, what is the truth which sets Christians free and leads them to righteousness? The next verses (22–24) give the answer. To ‘learn Christ’ is to grasp the new creation which he has made possible, and the entirely new life which results from it. It is nothing less than putting off our old humanity like a rotten garment and putting on like clean clothing the new humanity recreated in God’s image.

When does this take place? RSV is seriously misleading in that it renders the infinitive verbs as if they were imperatives, and thus represents Paul’s written instruction as fresh commands to his readers: *Put off your old nature ... and put on the new nature* (verses 22, 24). But this cannot be right, for two main reasons. First, in the parallel passage in Colossians the verbs are aorist participles, indicating what the Colossian Christians did at the time of their conversion: ‘Seeing that you have put off the old nature ... and have put on the new nature.’ Secondly, if they are commands in Ephesians 4:22, 24, then the command of verse 25 becomes a nonsense: *Therefore, putting away falsehood ...* Surely this ‘therefore’, which builds on what has just been written, can hardly base one command upon another, as if to say: ‘Put off your old nature ... and put on the new ... Therefore put away falsehood’. The Colossians parallel, on the other hand, makes perfect sense, because it builds a present command on a past fact. It reads: ‘Put all these things away—anger, malice, slander (*etc.*)—seeing that you have put off the old nature ... and have put on the new’ (3:8–10). It is because we have already put off our old nature, in that decisive act of repentance called conversion, that we can logically be commanded to put away all the practices which belong to that old and rejected life. In Ephesians 4 as in Colossians 3, therefore, the same logic is to be found. The verbs ‘put off’ and ‘put on’ are not fresh commands which the apostle is now addressing to his readers, but old ones which he gave when he was with them and of which

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

he now reminds them. Indeed, these commands are the very ‘truth as it is in Jesus’ which they had been taught and learned. So we should repunctuate these sentences, and replace the full stop at the end of verse 21 with a colon or with the word ‘namely’, thus: ‘You did not so learn Christ!—assuming that you ... were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, namely that you were to put off your old nature ... and put on the new ...’ JBP captures the sequence of thought well: ‘What you learned was to fling off ... and to put on ...’ So does NEB: ‘Were you not ... taught the truth as it is in Jesus?—that, leaving your former way of life, you must lay aside that old human nature.’

What had they been taught, then? They had been taught that becoming a Christian involves a radical change, namely ‘conversion’ (as the human side of the experience is usually called) and ‘re-creation’ (the divine side). It involves the repudiation of our former self, our fallen humanity, and the assumption of a new self or re-created humanity. Each of these two Paul calls (literally) a ‘man’, the ‘old man’ which is put off, and the ‘new man’ which is put on. Charles Hodge explains their language: ‘What is here called “the old man” Paul elsewhere calls himself, as in Rom. 7:14 “I am carnal” ... or “the flesh” ... as in Gal. 5:16, 17 ... It is called “man” because it is ourselves.’ Further, our former self and our new self are vividly contrasted with each other: ‘As we are called to put off our corrupt nature as a ragged and filthy garment, so we are required to put on our new nature as a garment of light. And as the former was personified as an old man, decrepit, deformed, and tending to corruption, so the latter is personified as a new man, fresh, beautiful and vigorous, like God ...’ *i.e.* created in his image.

The portraits Paul paints of both ‘men’ balance one another. The old was *corrupt*, in the process of degenerating, on its way to ruin or destruction; the new has been freshly *created after the likeness of God*. The old was dominated by *lusts*, uncontrolled passions; the new has been created in *righteousness and holiness*. The lusts of the old were *deceitful*; the righteousness of the new is *true*. Thus, corruption and creation, passion and holiness, deceit and truth are set in opposition to one another, indicating the total incompatibility of the old and the new, what we were in Adam and what we are in Christ.

In between these contrasting portraits of the kind of person we ‘put off’ and ‘put on’ comes verse 23: *and be renewed in the spirit of your minds*. This verb is a present infinitive, in distinction to those of verses 22 and 24 which are aorists. It indicates that, in addition to the decisive rejection of the old and assumption of the new, implicit in conversion, a daily—indeed a continuous—*inward renewal* of our outlook is involved in being a Christian. If heathen degradation is due to the futility of their minds, then Christian righteousness depends on the constant renewing of our minds.

In all this teaching the divine and the human are beautifully blended. In the command to exchange our old humanity for a new one, Paul is not implying that we can bring about our own new birth. Nobody has ever given birth to himself. The very concept is ludicrous. No, the new humanity we assume is God’s creation, not ours. Nevertheless, when God recreates us in Christ according to his own likeness, we entirely concur with what he has done. We ‘put off’ our old life, turning away from it in distaste, and we ‘put on’ the new life he has created, embracing it and welcoming it with joy. In a word, recreation (what God does) and repentance (what we do by his grace) belong together and cannot be separated.

All this the Ephesian and other Asian Christians had been taught. They had been thoroughly grounded in the nature and consequences of the new creation and the new life. It was part of the ‘truth in Jesus’ which they had learned. They had not only been taught to ‘put off’ the old and ‘put on’ the new; they had done it. The reality took place at their conversion. Then the symbolism may

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

have followed at their baptism, for some early baptisms included a ceremonial investiture with a white robe. Now Paul reminds them what they had learned and done.

Looking back over these verses, we can perhaps grasp more clearly the two solid doctrinal foundations for Christian holiness which Paul has laid. They are like two roots from which holiness sprouts and grows. First, we have experienced a new creation, and secondly, in consequence, we have received a new mind which is constantly being renewed. Moreover, the two are organically related to one another. It is our new creation which has given us a new mind; and it is our new mind which understands our new creation and its implications. Since it is a new creation in God's holy image, it has involved for us the total putting away of our old fallenness and the thankful putting on of our new humanness.

Therefore, Paul continues, 'each of you must put off ...' (verse 25, NIV). That is, because you did throw off your former self once and for all, you must now throw off all conduct which belonged to your old life. Your new behaviour must be completely consistent with the kind of person you have become. As we have already noted, the metaphor ('putting off' and 'putting on') is drawn from the way we dress. It can now be elaborated.

The kind of clothing we wear depends on the kind of role we are fulfilling. For example, when we go to a wedding we wear one kind of clothing; when we go to a funeral we wear another. I realize of course that some young people in the West wear blue jeans at all times. Nevertheless the custom of adapting our dress to suit the occasion still stands as a general principle. Many people's dress is also determined by their job. Soldiers and sailors wear different uniforms. Lawyers have special clothing, at least when they appear in court. So do some clergy. So do prisoners and convicts. But when we change our role, we change our dress. When prisoners are released from custody and become free people again (putting off one role and assuming another), they change what they are wearing (putting off prison garb and putting on ordinary clothes). Similarly, when a soldier leaves the army and becomes a civilian, he gets out of uniform into 'civvies'. Just so, since by a new creation we have put off the old humanity and put on the new, we must also put away the old standards and adopt new ones. Our new role will mean new clothing, our new life a new ethical lifestyle.

2. Six concrete examples (4:25–5:4)

It is marvellous to see how easily Paul can descend from lofty theological talk about our two humanities, about the Christ we have learned and the new creation we have experienced, to the nitty-gritty of Christian behaviour—telling the truth and controlling our anger, honesty at work and kindness of speech, forgiveness, love and sexual self-control. All very practical. And before we come to his six examples, we need to notice three features common to them all.

First, they all concern our relationships. Holiness is not a mystical condition experienced in relation to God but in isolation from human beings. You cannot be good in a vacuum, but only in the real world of people. Besides, 'all the qualities enjoined here are aspects of that unity in the church which it is our writer's prime concern to elucidate and to foster. To this matter he deliberately gives pride of place ... Similarly, the evils to be avoided are all destroyers of human harmony.'

Secondly, in each example a negative prohibition is balanced by a corresponding positive command. It is not enough to put off the old rags; we have to put on new garments. It is not enough to give up lying and stealing and losing our temper, unless we also start speaking the truth, working hard and being kind to people.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Thirdly, in each case a reason for the command is either given or implied, indeed a theological reason. For in the teaching of Jesus and his apostles doctrine and ethics, belief and behaviour are always dovetailed into one another.

a. Don't tell lies, but rather tell the truth (verse 25)

Strictly speaking, the Greek word is not *falsehood* in the abstract but 'the lie' (*to pseudos*). It is possible, therefore, that Paul is referring here as in Romans 1:25 to 'the great lie of idolatry', and that because his readers had renounced that supreme falsehood of paganism, the chief symptom of a futile and darkened mind (verses 17–18), he urges them now to forsake all lesser lies and speak the truth. Certainly the avoidance of lies is of little use without the active pursuit of truth. The followers of Jesus (in whom is truth, verse 21) should be known in their community as honest, reliable people whose word can be trusted. The reason given is not only that the other person is our *neighbour*, whom we are commanded in Scripture to love, but that in the church our relationship is closer still, *for we are members one of another*. Paul brings us back to his doctrine of the church as the body of Christ (*cf.* verses 12–16), and implies that 'a lie is a stab into the very vitals of the Body of Christ'. For fellowship is built on trust, and trust is built on truth. So falsehood undermines fellowship, while truth strengthens it.

b. Don't lose your temper, but rather ensure that your anger is righteous (verses 26–27)

'Be angry, but sin not' is an echo of Psalm 4:4. It seems clear that this form of words is a Hebrew idiom which permits and then restricts anger, rather than actually commanding it. The equivalent English idiom would be 'in your anger do not sin' (NIV). Nevertheless, the verse recognizes that there is such a thing as Christian anger, and too few Christians either feel or express it. Indeed, when we fail to do so, we deny God, damage ourselves and encourage the spread of evil.

Scripture plainly teaches that there are two kinds of anger, righteous and unrighteous. In verse 31 'anger' is one of a number of unpleasant things which we are to 'put away' from us. Evidently unrighteous anger is meant. But in 5:6 we are told of the anger of God which will fall on the disobedient, and we know that God's anger is righteous. So was the anger of Jesus. There must therefore be a good and true anger which God's people can learn from him and from their Lord Jesus.

I go further and say that there is a great need in the contemporary world for more Christian anger. We human beings compromise with sin in a way in which God never does. In the face of blatant evil we should be indignant not tolerant, angry not apathetic. If God hates sin, his people should hate it too. If evil arouses his anger, it should arouse ours also. 'Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, who forsake thy law.' What other reaction can wickedness be expected to provoke in those who love God?

It is particularly noteworthy that the apostle introduces this reference to anger in a letter devoted to God's new society of love, and in a paragraph concerned with harmonious relationships. He does so because true peace is not identical with appeasement. 'In such a world as this,' comments E. K. Simpson, 'the truest peace-maker may have to assume the role of a peace-breaker as a sacred obligation.'

At the same time, we need to remember our fallenness, and our constant proneness to intemperance and vanity. Consequently, we always have to be on our guard and act as censors of our own anger. If we are wise, we shall be 'slow to anger', remembering that 'the anger of man

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

does not work the righteousness of God'. So Paul immediately qualifies his permissive *be angry* by three negatives. First, *do not sin*. We have to make sure that our anger is free from injured pride, spite, malice, animosity and the spirit of revenge. Secondly, *do not let the sun go down on your anger*. This instruction illustrates well the folly of excessive literalism in interpreting the Bible. We are not to understand Paul 'so literally that we may take leave to be angry till sunset', for 'then might our wrath lengthen with the days, and men in Greenland, where days last above a quarter of the year, have plentiful scope of revenge'. No, the apostle's intention is to warn us against nursing anger. It is seldom safe to allow the embers to smoulder. Certainly if we become aware of some sinful or selfish element in it (and if our *orgē*, anger, degenerates into *parorgismos*, resentment, the word used at the end of verse 26), then it is time for us to cease from it, and either apologize or be reconciled to the person concerned. In the Old Testament a moneylender who took a poor person's cloak as a pledge was required to restore it 'when the sun goes down', so that he might sleep in it, and an employer who had any servants who were poor and needy was required to pay them their wages daily 'before the sun goes down'. There are many similar situations in which it is wise to live a day at a time. 'Never go to bed angry' is a good rule, and is seldom more applicable than to a married couple.

Paul's third qualification is *give no opportunity to the devil* (verse 27), for he knows how fine is the line between righteous and unrighteous anger, and how hard human beings find it to handle their anger responsibly. So he loves to lurk round angry people, hoping to be able to exploit the situation to his own advantage by provoking them into hatred or violence or a breach of fellowship.

c. *Don't steal, but rather work and give (verse 28)*

'Do not steal' was the eighth commandment of Moses' law. It had and still has a wide application, not only to the stealing of other people's money or possessions, but also to tax evasions and customs dodges which rob the government of their dues, to employers who oppress their workers, and to employees who give poor service or work short time.

In echoing the commandment (*let the thief no longer steal*), however, the apostle goes beyond the prohibition and draws out its positive implications. It is not enough that the thief stops stealing. Let him start working, *doing honest work with his hands*, earning his own living. Then he will *be able* not only to support himself and his family, but also *to give to those in need*. Instead of sponging on the community, as thieves do, he will start contributing to it. And none but Christ can transform a burglar into a benefactor!

d. *Don't use your mouth for evil, but rather for good (verses 29–30)*

The apostle turns from the use of our hands to the use of our mouths. Speech is a wonderful gift of God. It is one of our human capacities which reflect our likeness to God. For our God speaks, and like him we also speak. Speech distinguishes us from the animal creation. Cows can moo, dogs bark, donkeys bray, pigs grunt, lambs bleat, lions roar, monkeys squeal and birds sing, but only human beings can speak.

So *let no evil talk come out of your mouths*, Paul says. 'Evil' here is *sapros*, a word used of rotten trees and rotten fruit. When applied to rotten talk, whether this is dishonest, unkind or vulgar, we may be sure that in some way it hurts the hearers. Instead, we are to use our unique gift of speech constructively, *for edifying*, that is to build people up and not damage or destroy them, *as fits the occasion*. Then our words will *impart grace to those who hear*.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Jesus taught the great significance of speech. Our words reveal what is in our hearts, he said, and we shall have to give an account on judgment day of every careless word we have uttered. So James was only echoing the teaching of his Master when he emphasized the immense power of the human tongue for good or evil.⁵ If we are truly a new creation of God, we shall undoubtedly develop new standards of conversation. Instead of hurting people with our words, we shall want to use them to help, encourage, cheer, comfort and stimulate them. I have myself often been challenged by the contrasting speech of the wise man and the fool in Proverbs 12:18: 'There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing'.

It is not immediately clear why Paul now introduces the Holy Spirit: *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption* (verse 30). But the apostle was constantly aware that behind the actions of human beings invisible personalities are present and active. He has just warned us to give no opportunity to the devil (verse 27); now he urges us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. It is evident from this that the Holy Spirit is fully personal, for *lypeō* is to cause sorrow, pain or distress, and only persons can feel these things. But what grieves him? Since he is the 'holy Spirit', he is always grieved by unholiness, and since he is the 'one Spirit' (2:18; 4:4), disunity will also cause him grief. In fact, anything incompatible with the purity or unity of the church is incompatible with his own nature and therefore hurts him. One might add that because he is also the 'Spirit of truth', through whom God has spoken, he is upset by all our misuse of speech, which has been Paul's topic in the preceding verse.

We notice also in verse 30 the references to being *sealed* with the Spirit and to *the day of redemption*. The sealing (as Paul has already explained in 1:13) took place at the beginning of our Christian life; the Holy Spirit himself, indwelling us, is the seal with which God has stamped us as his own. The day of redemption, however, although we already have redemption in the sense of forgiveness (verse 1:7), looks on to the end when our bodies will be redeemed, for only then will our redemption or liberation be complete. So the 'sealing' and the 'redemption' refer respectively to the beginning and the end of the salvation process. And in between these two termini we are to grow in Christlikeness and to take care not to grieve the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is a sensitive Spirit. He hates sin, discord and falsehood, and shrinks away from them. Therefore, if we wish to avoid hurting him, we shall shrink from them too. Every Spirit-filled believer desires to bring him pleasure, not pain.

e. Don't be unkind or bitter, but rather kind and loving (4:31–5:2)

Here is a whole series of six unpleasant attitudes and actions which are to be *put away* from us entirely. *Bitterness* (*pikria*) is a sour spirit and sour speech. We sometimes talk about a 'sour puss', and I guess there are sour tomcats too. Little is sadder in elderly people than a negative and cynical outlook on life. Quoting Aristotle, Armitage Robinson defines it as 'an embittered and resentful spirit which refuses to be reconciled'. *Wrath* (*thymos*) and *anger* (*orgē*) are obviously similar, the former denoting a passionate rage and the latter a more settled and sullen hostility. *Clamour* (*kraugē*) describes people who get excited, raise their voices in a quarrel, and start shouting, even screaming, at each other, while *slander* (*blasphēmia*) is speaking evil of others, especially behind their backs, and so defaming and even destroying their reputation. The sixth word is *malice* (*kakia*), or ill will, wishing and probably plotting evil against people. Alternatively, it may be inclusive of the five preceding vices, namely 'silently harboured grudge, indignant outburst, seething rage, public quarrel and slanderous taunt.' There is no place for any of these horrid things in the Christian community; they have to be totally rejected.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

In their place we should welcome the kind of qualities which characterize the behaviour of God and his Christ. We are to *be kind to one another*. The word is *chrēstos*, and because of the obvious assonance with the name of Christ (*Christos*), Christians from the beginning saw its peculiar appropriateness. It occurs in the Sermon on the Mount for God's kindness towards even 'the ungrateful and the selfish'. *Tenderhearted* is 'compassionate', while *forgiving one another* (*charizomenoi*) is literally 'acting in grace' towards one another, as God in Christ has acted in grace towards us. *Therefore*, because of God's gracious attitude and generous actions towards us, we are to *be imitators (mimētai) of God, as beloved children*. Just as children copy their parents, so we are to copy our Father God, as Jesus himself told us to. We are also to follow Christ, to *walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*. The same verb for self-giving (*paradidōmi*) is used of the heathen in 4:19. They give themselves up to licentiousness; we like Christ are to give ourselves up to love. Such self-giving for others is pleasing to God. As with Christ so with us, self-sacrificial love is a *fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. It is thus a striking truth that sacrificial love for others becomes a sacrifice acceptable to God.

It is noteworthy how God-centred Paul's ethic is. It is natural for him, in issuing his moral instructions, to mention the three Persons of the Trinity. He tells us to 'copy God', to 'learn Christ' and not to 'grieve the Holy Spirit'.

f. Don't joke about sex, but rather give thanks for it (verses 3–4)

Paul turns from 'self-sacrifice ... to its very opposite, self-indulgence', from genuine 'love' to that perversion of it called 'lust'. The Greek words for *fornication (porneia)* and *impurity (akatharsia)* together cover every kind of sexual sin, in other words all sexual intercourse outside its God-ordained context of a loving marriage. To them Paul adds *covetousness*, surely because they are an especially degrading form of it, namely the coveting of somebody else's body for selfish gratification. The tenth commandment had specifically prohibited coveting a neighbour's wife, and earlier in this letter Paul has written of the 'greed' involved in unclean practices (4:19). So all forms of sexual immorality, he writes, *must not even be named among you*. We are not only to avoid their indulgence, but also to avoid thinking and talking about them, so completely are they to be banished from the Christian community. This was a high and holy standard to demand, for immorality was rife in Asia. And since the Greek goddess Artemis, 'Diana of the Ephesians', was regarded as a fertility goddess, sexual orgies were regularly associated with her worship.

Verse 4 goes beyond immorality to vulgarity. For *filthiness* means obscenity, and both *silly talk* and *levity* are probably an allusion to coarse jesting, which is the cheapest form of wit. All three refer to a dirty mind expressing itself in dirty conversation. But these things *are not fitting*. *Instead*, Paul says, *let there be thanksgiving*. The contrast is striking and beautiful. In itself thanksgiving is not an obvious substitute for vulgarity, since the latter is essentially self-centred, and the former God-centred. But perhaps this is the point that Paul is making: 'Whereas sexual impurity and covetousness both express self-centred acquisitiveness, thanksgiving is the exact opposite, and so the antidote required; it is the recognition of God's generosity'. It seems to me probable, however, that Paul is setting vulgarity and thanksgiving even more plainly in opposition to each other, namely as alternative pagan and Christian attitudes to sex. Of course Christians have a bad reputation for being negative towards sex. Dr Michel Fourcault, since 1970 Professor of the History of Thought Systems at the Collège de France, is apparently writing a *History of Sexuality* in six volumes. Explaining his work in *Le Monde* in January 1977 he spoke of 'Christianity's most intolerably burdensome legacy, sex as sin'. And it is true that some of our Victorian forefathers

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

came close to this identification. But the reason why Christians should dislike and avoid vulgarity is not because we have a warped view of sex, and are either ashamed or afraid of it, but because we have a high and holy view of it as being in its right place God's good gift, which we do not want to see cheapened. All God's gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving, rather than for joking. To joke about them is bound to degrade them; to thank God for them is the way to preserve their worth as the blessings of a loving Creator.

Conclusion

What is the theme which has run right through chapter 4 and spilled over into chapter 5? These chapters are a stirring summons to the unity and purity of the church; but they are more than that. Their theme is the integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe) and Christian ethics (how we behave). They emphasize that being, thought and action belong together and must never be separated. For what we are governs how we think, and how we think determines how we act. We are God's new society, a people who have put off the old life and put on the new; that is what he has made us. So we need to recall this by the daily renewal of our minds, remembering how we 'learned Christ ... as the truth is in Jesus', and thinking Christianly about ourselves and our new status. Then we must actively cultivate a Christian life. For holiness is not a condition into which we drift. We are not passive spectators of a sanctification God works in us. On the contrary, we have purposefully to 'put away' from us all conduct that is incompatible with our new life in Christ, and to 'put on' a lifestyle compatible with it.

Two words stand out as summarizing this theme. In 4:1 Paul begs us to lead a life that is *worthy* of God's call, and in 5:3 he tells us to avoid immorality, 'as is *fitting* among saints'. It is most unfortunate that the word 'saints' has come to be used, if not for the heroes of the church who have been canonized, then at least for exceptional and often eccentric people who are distinguished from others by their pallid countenance, heavenward look and invisible halo. But 'the saints' are all God's people who have been reconciled to him and to each other. Therefore, certain kinds of behaviour are 'worthy', or 'fitting', being appropriate to who we are, while certain others are 'unworthy' or 'unfitting', being inappropriate.

Let no-one say that doctrine does not matter! Good conduct arises out of good doctrine. It is only when we have grasped clearly who we are in Christ, that the desire will grow within us to live a life that is worthy of our calling and fitting to our character as God's new society.¹⁰

¹⁰ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God's new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 143–194). InterVarsity Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Ephesians 4:1–16

Growing Together into Christ

PREVIEW

The prayer and doxology at the end of chapter 3 provide a fitting conclusion to the first half of Ephesians. They also anticipate the believers' grateful response to God's grace. The second half of the letter thus begins with an urgent exhortation *to lead a life worthy of the calling* explored in the first half of Ephesians.

The stress falls first on *unity*. At the center of the rehearsal of grace in the first half of the letter is Christ's work of peace to make **one new human** out of erstwhile enemies (2:11–22; Introduction). Keeping that unity now becomes the work of the church (4:3). This is followed by a list of seven essential items with which that unity is secured (4:4–6). Verses 7–16 continue the focus on unity by emphasizing Christ's act of giving gifts to the church (4:7–11) so that the church can make unity a reality (4:13). Verses 9–10 are a brief parenthesis, applying Psalm 68:18 to Christ as gift-giver. Whereas 4:1 begins the exhortation half of Ephesians, verses 7–16 are more accurately a theological reflection on the church's growth and Christ's role as gift-bearer and head. The exhortation proper is taken up again in verse 17.

Lists are a prominent feature in this passage (see Structure below and Schematic Trans. in an appendix). Most obvious is the "unity list" in verses 4–6, the list of gifts Christ has given the church in verse 11, and the various ways Christ is identified as the goal of the church's growth in verse 13.

Structure of 4:1–16

I therefore beg *you*

to walk worthy of the calling to which you were called—

[a list of "virtues required for unity"]

—eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:

[a list of "unity items" of the "chain of unity"] (4:1–6)

But to each one of *us* was given the grace according to the measure

of the gift of Christ. (4:7)

[Parenthesis: a brief interpretation of Psalm 68:18 in light of

Christ as victorious gift-giver] (4:8–10)

And he *himself* gave

[a list of gifts: persons with particular tasks]

... for the *equipment* of the saints for the work of ministry,

[which is] *building up* the body of Christ,

... who is the *head* out of whom the whole *body*

builds itself up in love. (4:11–16)

Readers should pay close attention to the interplay between the unity of the body, on one hand, and the empowerment and giftedness of individuals, on the other. Second, note how leadership (*gifts*) and general membership of the church (*saints*) relate to each other and the ministry of the church. Third, whereas the church is again identified as the *body of Christ* (4:4; cf. 1:23), the sense of incompleteness is strongly emphasized in these verses (4:13, 16). The task of the church is to become what it already is.

It is unclear whether the emphasis on unity reflects a specific division among the recipients of the letter. More likely, disunity was a constant danger or even reality for Paul and his followers (Introduction). Issues of ethics and mission are often divisive because they expose theological and doctrinal differences. Perhaps the concern for unity is at the head of the exhortation to respond to growing fractiousness in Pauline churches in the decades after Paul's death.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

OUTLINE

Summons to Unity, 4:1–6

4:1	The Prisoner's Request
4:2–3	The Bond of Peace
4:4–6	Bonds of Unity

Equipped to Grow into Christ, 4:7–16

4:7	The Gift of Christ
4:8–10	Christ the Ascending and Descending Giver
4:11	The Gifts
4:12–16	The Purpose of the Gifts
To Equip the Saints for Ministry	4:12
To Arrive at the Fullness of Christ	4:13–14
To Grow into Christ	4:15–16

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Summons to Unity 4:1–6

4:1 *The Prisoner's Request*

As in 3:1, Paul appears in chains. *I urge you, therefore, I, the prisoner in the Lord ...* Presenting Paul thus as a captive *in the Lord* has clear metaphorical and theological significance, whether or not the letter is from his own hand and whether or not actual incarceration lies behind the phrase (3:1, notes). The urging comes with the weight of someone who has no alternative but to exhort the saints—Paul is a captive of his apostolic commission from the Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15–23). He has no choice and neither do his readers, who have been led into the gracious mystery of their salvation by the great *ambassador in chains* (6:20).

Perhaps that accounts for the emphatic *I*. With a rather clever wordplay, the one in *bonds* (*desmios*) exhorts his readers to *keep the unity in the bond of peace* (*sundesmos*, 4:3). As bondservants of the same Lord, both exhorter and exhorted share the same gracious captivity.

The exhortation begins with the important *therefore* (*oun*). The importance of this little word for Christian ethics can hardly be overstated. Exhortation (*paraenesis*) typically appears in Pauline letters *after* a recitation of what God has done for believers. The faithful life of a believer is nothing other than a grateful response to grace. Salvation is not *by* works (2:8) but *for* works (2:10). Romans 12:1 makes clear why: “I appeal to you therefore, ..., by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice.”

Here the image is not sacrifice but *walking* (*worthily*) *in keeping with the calling*. *Walking* is a common biblical expression for how people live out their lives (cf. 2:2; “Two Ways of Walking,” TBC for 2:1–10; 4:17; 5:2, 8, 15; cf., e.g., Deut. 10:12; Prov. 2:20; Isa. 30:21; Mic. 4:5; John 8:12; 12:35; 1 John 1:7). Today one might speak of “lifestyle.” The biblical image is less static, however. It implies that human life is heading somewhere, either to life or to death (see esp. 2:1–10).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Call and *calling* (*kaleō* and cognates) are prominent in this opening to the exhortation. Even the term we have translated as *urge* is related in the Greek to *call* (*parakaleō*; Liddell and Scott; cf. Best, 1998:361; Schmidt; Schmitz). What is *the calling* in which and toward which believers are called? For a Jewish writer, walking as *holy ones* or *saints* means, first of all, doing God's will, the *good works* God has prepared for humanity (2:10). Further, in verse 4 as in 1:18, this *calling* is directly linked to *hope*. God's call to believers is that they *walk in hope* toward that for which they hope.

At the beginning of this exhortation, we thus observe the characteristic Pauline tension between the *already* and the *not yet*. Believers are to live *presently* by the power and the values of that which they will most certainly receive fully *in the future*. They are *already* the body of Christ (1:23; 2:16), and *already* enjoy the fullness of God (1:23; 3:19), but they together with *all things* (1:10) have not yet fully grown into Christ. They are still in the process of being filled. They *have been saved* (2:5, 8) to participate in bringing salvation to completion (6:17, notes).

4:2–3 The Bond of Peace

The irony inherent in the image of an imprisoned messenger (3:1; 6:20), as in that of a crucified pacifier (2:14–18), is to characterize the lives of all believers. The *chosen* (1:4) have been *raised and seated with Christ in the heavenlies* (2:5–6); as living temples they furnish God with a home (2:21–22) and bear the *fullness of God* (3:19). Now they are asked to *walk* (2:1) in keeping with that grand and lofty calling *with all humility and gentleness, with patience*.

This collection of virtues, likely derived from Colossians 3:12, hardly reflects the strutting of the privileged sons and daughters of God or of the enlightened elite. Indeed, in the broader Gentile culture such humility would have been viewed as embarrassing nonassertiveness and hardly as a virtue (see Best, 1998:362; TBC). But Paul understood it to be the necessary glue to hold the body of the Christ together (e.g., Rom. 12:16; Phil. 2:3, 8; Col. 3:12). The exercise of *patience* (*makrothumia*) imitates a God of patience (cf., e.g., Exod. 34:6, LXX; Ps. 85:15, LXX), and anticipates the imitation of God in 4:32–5:1. *Bearing with one another in love* aptly captures these virtues and gives them their integrity and community-building character (Russell: 76; on these virtues, TBC).

The next directive dispels any notion that such a disposition is in any sense passive. Believers are to be *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. *To be eager or to hurry* (*spoudazō*) captures the urgency with which *unity* is to be maintained. In the NT, the term for *unity* (*henotēs*) is unique to Ephesians (cf. also 4:13). It is a unity *of the Spirit*, meaning a unity the Spirit makes possible (cf. 2:18). *Unity* is a divine gift to humanity and has been purchased at enormous cost (2:14–16). Even so, this gift is fragile, and its maintenance and ongoing realization require all the energy and resourcefulness, all the eagerness and zeal, with which God has endowed believers through the Spirit.

The irony returns to full view in the final image of this sentence: *the bond (sundesmos) of peace*. *Sundesmos* can mean “joint,” “tie,” “band,” or “chain”—anything that binds things. *Peace* is the fetter of unity. Humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance are the links in this chain of peace (4:2–3).

Peace is more than harmonious relations in a particular congregation, however, as much as it includes them. As chapter 2 shows, Christ's work of peace results in a new humanity, a body of reconciled enemies. The horizon of such peace clearly extends beyond the local congregation to the church at large and then beyond to *all things*. The church is the beachhead for a peace that is to extend to the cosmos (notes for 1:10 and 2:11–22). So the focus shifts now from the interpersonal relations (4:2–3) to the universal church (4:4–6), and indeed, to the one God and Father who is *over and through and in all things* (4:6).

4:4–6 Bonds of Unity

Attached to the exhortation to maintain unity is a list of seven items in relation to which unity is to be experienced and preserved. Some interpreters believe this to be traditional creedal material (e.g., Barth, 1974:429), associated perhaps with the celebration of baptism. No one doubts that the author has shaped this list as we presently have it, whatever the traditional background might be (Best, 1998:357–9; Lincoln: 228–9; Perkins: 96, suggesting it is constructed using 1 Cor. 12:12–13; 8:6).

Notice, first, the number of affirmations—seven. This is no mere happenstance. The number *seven* is a well-known biblical number of completion. Here it serves well the theme of unity. Second, whereas a hierarchy in the order is not obvious, the importance of the church in Ephesians is shown by the fact that the first item is the *body*. By saying *body* and not *church*, the point is made that in both its identity and its task the church is inseparable from the head, Christ, whose body the church is (4:15–16). In characteristic Pauline fashion, the *body* is inseparable from the *Spirit* that gives it breath and energy (cf. 1 Cor. 12:13).

The next item echoes verse 1—*just as you were called to the one hope of your calling*. Both mission and hope are inextricably connected to *body* and *spirit*. After all, *body* is not a static or institutional concept. The body is an organism, enlivened by the breath (*pneuma*, wind, spirit) of God (2:5, 18), whose growth will not be complete until *all things are gathered up in Christ* (1:10; 4:13). And the *Spirit* is always the wind blowing from the future, quickening the church with that which is yet to come, enabling the church to live toward that future (cf. 1:13).

To many readers, the compact triad in verse 5 sounds like a baptismal acclamation (the last item is *one baptism*). Each item is a noun of a different gender, which contributes to the formula-like nature of the triad: *one (heis) Lord, one (mia) faith, one (hen) baptism*. At issue in *one baptism* is not the mode of baptism, but the one into whom believers are baptized: Jesus Christ, the *one Lord*. *One faith* has as its content the conviction that God has called a church into being through Christ's death, that such a church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and that this church shares the Christ's identity and task as it awaits its hope.

The theocentric vision underlying this whole letter comes to expression in the final acclamation of faith in verse 6: *one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all*. God is ultimately the author and the goal of unity (cf. esp. the opening blessing in 1:3–14).

The acclamation that God is *one* is deeply rooted in Jewish faith (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). At daily prayer, Jews affirmed it in the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD” (Deut. 6:4, KJV/RSV). It is not surprising for us to find this at the center of Christian

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

affirmation. Even so, we see the germ of later trinitarianism in these affirmations (Fee, 1994:702; Perkins: 96). The *Father* and the *Lord* and the *Spirit* are all present. But note that in this list they stand alongside the *body*. In this list, it is God *the Father of all*, not only of the Son, who stands above, before, and after all, and whose fullness pervades *all things* (cf. 3:19; cf. Rom. 11:36; Best, 1998:370–1, on how encompassing *all* is).

Is this exhortation to unity a call for uniformity? Is the insistence on *one* body, *one* faith, and *one* baptism an assertion that only the view held here can claim legitimacy? Verse 14 suggests that the author is deeply concerned about the destructive effect of false teachings on the unity of the church and the spiritual health of vulnerable believers. In chapter 5 the author will draw sharp distinctions between light and darkness.

Even so, the governing vision in Ephesians is one of gathering, not elimination. Unity is clearly understood as adherence to the *one Lord* and the peace he created *in himself* (2:15; cf. 1:10). But it is a unity that is generous and inclusive at its core, one to be zealously maintained by all who have been liberated from the realm of death and called to life in the *new humanity* (Yoder Neufeld, 1993:211–32).

Equipped to Grow into Christ 4:7–16

4:7 The Gift of Christ

With verse 7 attention shifts from inclusive unity to *each one of us*, and the *gift* each receives. Three different words for “giving” and “gift” appear in verse 7. *Each one of us* has been *given* (*didōmi*) the *grace* (*charis*) according to the measure of the *gift* (*dōrea*). The term translated here as *grace* (*charis*) can also be translated as gift (cf. the “gifts of the Spirit” [*charismata*] in 1 Cor. 12:4). This heaping up of synonyms fits the style of this letter very well (e.g., 1:19, 21; 3:20; 6:10). Its purpose is to bring special emphasis: the church is supplied with *every gift* it needs for the task of unity.

The identity of both giver and receivers is not immediately obvious. In biblical language the passive (*was given*) usually implies God as actor. God is thus the implied giver. The *measure* of the *gift* (or *grace*) God gives *to each one of us* is that which God has already given to and in Christ. Such a line of thought is already present in 1:19–23 and is clearly implied in 2:4–7 (notes).

However, as the author interprets Psalm 68:18 in verses 9 and 10, Christ himself is the giver of gifts. The *measure* of Christ’s gift is then *the boundless riches of Christ* (cf. 3:8). The text obviously implies that God remains the ultimate Giver because the Messiah, God’s agent of grace and salvation, delivers the gifts.

Though earlier in this passage the emphasis was on the *one body*, here the emphasis falls on *each one of us* as the recipients of Christ’s gifts (cf. 4:16). There is some ambiguity as to who is included in the category *each one*. Some interpreters prefer to see *each one of us* in close connection with verse 11 (*apostles, prophets, evangelists*, and others). The first person plural—*each one of us*—would then refer to Paul and other leaders of the church, and not to all members (so, e.g., Schlier, 1971:191). However, verse 11 makes clear that the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers are themselves *gifts* that Christ has given to all *the saints* (4:12)—to the church as a whole. In this instance, they are the gifts, not the gifted.

There is little in Ephesians to support the idea of a gifted elite (cf. 3:8, notes). *Each one of us* should be taken to refer to each of the saints who make up the body (cf. Rom. 12:3). The gifts the saints have been given are in this case the special messengers, teachers, and pastors listed in verse 11 (Barth, 1974:480; Best, 1998:376–7; Lincoln: 241; R. Martin, 1991:53; Schnackenburg: 177–8). The emphasis on unity is not allowed to obscure or devalue the individual who receives the gift or the grace from Christ. Likewise, the gifts are received and exercised only in the unity of the body, even if, as here, the emphasis falls on the gifts of leaders and teachers.

4:8–10 Christ the Ascending and Descending Giver

By means of a “midrash pesher” (a rabbinic style of biblical interpretation stressing recent or present fulfillment; Lincoln: 242–4; cf. Best, 1998:375; Perkins: 97), the author now employs Psalm 68:18 to illustrate the giving of gifts. Psalm 68 is one of the great hymns extolling God as victorious warrior (cf. notes on the divine warrior at 1:15–23; 6:10–20). God ascends Mount Zion after liberating his people and vanquishing his foes. On his ascent he receives gifts of tribute from the people. In Ephesians the quotation has undergone some significant alterations.

Psalm 68:18 (NRSV)

Ephesians 4:8 (NRSV)

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

You ascended the high mount,

When he ascended on high

leading captives in your train

he made captivity itself a captive;

and receiving gifts from people.

he gave gifts to [his] people.

The reader encounters several surprises when comparing Ephesians 4:8 with Psalm 68:18. We will distinguish between changes the author has made and differences permitted in the process of translation.

First, the second person *you ascended* is changed to the third person *he ascended* (lit., *having ascended*, which can mean either *when*, as in NIV and NRSV, or *after*). This allows the author to transform an acclamation of worship directed to God into a claim about Christ (KJV, NKJV, TEV translate Ps. 68:18 in the third person).

Second, NIV and NRSV present the final phrase in the first line in Ephesians 4:8 as *he took captivity captive*. This might seem like the complete opposite of *leading captives in his train* and thus a major change from the Psalm text. However, as most translations have it, and as virtually all commentators agree, the abstract noun *captivity* is an idiom for *captives* themselves (cf. Num. 31:12, LXX; *BAGD*: 26; Barth, 1974:431; so NAB and NJB in both Ps. 68 and Eph. 4:8). The Greek OT (LXX) translates the Hebrew in such a way that in English it can accurately mean both “taking captives” and “taking captivity captive” (hence *leading captivity captive* appears in KJV/NKJV of both Ps. 68:18 and Eph. 4:8).

We should respect the ambiguity of the text. If we translate verse 8 as *taking captives*, we should perhaps think of Christ taking captive the powers (cf. 1:21; 6:12; cf. also 1 Cor. 15:24; and esp. Col. 2:15; the psalm thus anticipates the activity of the church’s participation in divine warfare in 6:10–20; cf. also Perkins: 98). Early commentators often took this to refer to Christ’s liberation of Satan’s captives (see Best, 1998:382). We might even hear an echo of the “captivity” of Paul and those who zealously keep the chain of peace secure (4:1, 3; cf. 2 Cor. 2:14). On the other hand, *taking captivity [itself] captive* conforms perfectly to the irony encountered in 2:16, where Christ *murders enmity*. Where the text does not force a decision, interpreters should avoid making one. Instead, we should savor the interpretive possibilities.

The most important difference from Psalm 68 is that the one who ascends or has ascended the heights does not *receive* gifts but *gives* them. Christ’s *giving* gifts in verses 7 and 11 is no doubt the reason for this change. It is not a change, however, unique to Ephesians. The Jewish Pentecost liturgy used Psalm 68:18 to celebrate Moses’ *giving* of the law after ascending Mount Sinai (Best, 1998:378–82, with documentation; Lincoln: 242–4; Yoder Neufeld, 1997:100). The author’s freedom in adapting Scriptures to his purposes is rooted in precedent, and it is anything but arbitrary.

In Ephesians, the identification of Christ is not with Moses, however, but with the victorious God of Psalm 68. The identification with God is further made clear in verse 10, where Christ’s ascension leads to his filling *all things*, the whole of the cosmos (cf. 4:6; cf. also 1:10, 23; 3:19).

Victorious warriors receive tribute; they do not pass out gifts. But in our text, Psalm 68:18 has been turned on its head. The note of victory is loud and clear, but here the victor *offers* gifts to those from whom he might have expected to receive them. This point becomes even sharper when it is observed that in Psalm 68 the divine victor receives gifts of tribute from the rebellious. In Ephesians, the divine victor *gives* gifts to those who were once rebellious *sons of disobedience* (cf. 2:1–3).

Verses 9 and 10 are a parenthesis (explicitly so in, e.g., NIV, NRSV, NASB). The author attaches an interpretive comment (“christological midrash,” Lincoln: 244) to the citation of Psalm 68:18 to draw attention to a particular point of the biblical text. *What does it imply that “he went up” other than that he also came down into the lower [parts] of the earth?*

There are roughly three ways of understanding this difficult sentence. The first view takes *the lower [parts] of the earth* to refer to the underworld, the realm of the dead (cf., e.g., Rom. 10:7; 1 Pet. 3:19; Rev.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

1:18). This connection has found considerable scholarly support; it also was the preferred interpretation in the first centuries of the church (survey in Barth, 1974:432–4; Best, 1998:383–6; Lincoln: 244–7; Russell: 76). Ephesians expresses no interest, however, in going any lower than the earth.

It should be noted that *parts* is not supported in the best manuscripts (hence square brackets in my translation); more carefully translated, we should say *the lowers* (*ta katōtera*), much as we speak elsewhere of *the heavenlies* (*ta epourania*; 1:3–14, notes) [*Cosmology*]. Lincoln thus suggests that the genitive of *the earth* be understood rather as a genitive of apposition, *the lower regions, that is, the earth* (245; so similarly NIV: *lower, earthly regions*). A visit to hell, as it were, is not likely what the author has in mind.

But to what then does the descent to these *lowers* refer? One suggestion is that it refers to Christ's incarnation (Best, 1998:386), reading verse 9 in light of the christological wisdom hymns in Philippians 2:6–11 and John 1. The affinities of the Christology of Ephesians to the wisdom tradition have been noted earlier (notes on 1:3–14; 1:15–23) [*Wisdom*]. Some manuscripts indeed include the word *first* (*he first descended to the lowers*, hinting at incarnation). The *gift* would then refer to Christ's coming to earth.

A third view takes the descent to refer to Christ's *post-Easter* descent at Pentecost in the form of the Spirit (e.g., Lincoln: 247; R. Martin, 1991:50). The role of Psalm 68:18 in Jewish Pentecost celebrations was noted earlier. Christ, the risen and exalted victor, descends in the form of the Spirit to give gifts to his body. The pattern observed throughout the letter is again visible: the best measure of the power and might of God, even when depicted as military conquest, is ironically the offering of love, grace, and gifts to rebellious humanity (cf. 2:4, 13–18). Divine power expresses itself in the empowerment of others.

While the third interpretation might be preferred, given the emphasis in verse 11 on *gifts* rather than *gift*, it is important not to be stingy in our interpretation. In the end, the generosity of God in Christ knows no limits. It includes the gift of Christ, for which God is blessed at the beginning of the letter (1:3–14), the gift of his peace (2:11–22), and here the ongoing generosity that accompanies the church in its growth into Christ.

Verse 10 should be read in such a light. It stresses again the ascension of Christ *far above all the heavens*. The one who came down—meaning the one who has touched the lives of those on *the lowers of the earth*—is none other than the one who has *ascended far above all the heavens* and who *fills all things*. How many heavens there are is of no interest here. The only point of interest is that the exaltation of the one who gives gifts knows no limits; nor, importantly, does his generosity.

4:11 The Gifts

Verses 11 to 16 are one long sentence, exploring the nature and purpose of Christ's gifts. Verse 11 provides a list of these gifts. Careful translation is key to understanding the gist of the argument. NIV, NRSV and other translations (e.g. NJB, REB) rather carelessly, in my view, leave the impression that Christ gives gifts to certain people, enabling them to be apostles, prophets, and teachers (as in Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28–30). They are the “gifted ones,” just as *each one of us* has been given a gift of some sort (Eph. 4:7) “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). However, our text quite literally lists *apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers* as the gifts themselves (Best, 1997:160–73; 1998:389–95).

Careful comparison with Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 allows the distinctiveness of our text to emerge (chart in TBC). In Ephesians, the list is of persons rather than ministries. Further, the list is much shorter than even Romans 12:8–10. The kinds of persons listed are essentially ministers of the word (cf. Barth, 1974:436): *apostles* and *prophets*, and proclaimers and teachers of the word that came through them—*evangelists, pastors and teachers*.

Apostles and *prophets* are already known from 2:20 (notes) and 3:5 (notes), where they are viewed as the *foundation* on which the edifice of the church is built. Their role is to receive and then authorize the teaching and beliefs of the church (Lincoln: 249; Schnackenburg: 184). If the working hypothesis in this commentary is correct, that Ephesians is written fairly late in the first century (Introduction), then the *apostles and prophets* are seen as an early gift of Christ to the church, Paul being one of the most important.

In some areas of the church, *prophets* continued to play a significant role in the period following the first generation of apostles. The late first-century Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (Didache) provides a set of instructions on how to recognize a true prophet among the many itinerant ones making their way through

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

the churches of Asia Minor (Didache 11–13). It is not clear that these are the prophets the author of Ephesians has in mind. More than likely, the author lists them with the apostles as founding “specialists in mediating divine revelation” (Lincoln: 249), and less as gifts presently operative in the churches he is addressing. That does not rule out the ongoing missionary and prophetic activity in Pauline congregations, as we see in the gift listed next.

New to the list of gifts are the *evangelists*, the *proclaimers of good news* to those both within and outside the church. Here the emphasis lies on service to the *saints*, who also must hear *good news*. Early on, that task was carried out by apostles—missionaries. But after their death, the apostles were increasingly viewed as founding authorities (2:20), and the ongoing task of proclaiming the gospel fell to evangelists (so also Best, 1997:163–6; 1998:391; Lincoln: 250; Schnackenburg: 184). Acts 21:8 may reflect this shift in vocabulary, even as it describes events taking place during the time of Paul and Peter (cf. 2 Tim. 4:5).

Pastors and *teachers* are listed last. Pastoring, literally *shepherding*, is mentioned elsewhere in the NT as service to the church only as an action rather than an office (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2). As 1 Peter makes clear, this ministry imitates “the chief shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4; cf. 2:25), “the good shepherd” (John 10:11), or “the great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20)—Jesus Christ. Only in Ephesians 4 are *shepherds* or *pastors* listed as designated gifts to the church. Their responsibility was likely to give guidance and direction to the church and to oversee the life of the flock (cf. John 21:15–17).

First Peter 2:25 identifies Jesus as both “shepherd” and “overseer/guardian” (*episkopos*, “bishop” in KJV; the cognate participle is present also in 1 Pet. 5:2; cf. Waltner: 156–8, 183–4). The proximity of *pastor* to the function of elder is also apparent in that passage. The wording in Ephesians may thus reflect that toward the end of the first century, “pastor,” “bishop,” and “elder” have become similar in meaning and function, referring to the exercise of oversight responsibilities in local congregations.

The term *teachers* (*didaskaloi*) is not preceded by an article; *pastors and teachers* may thus be much the same group. Barth refers to them as “teaching shepherds” (Barth, 1974:438; cf. also R. Martin, 1991:52; but see Best, 1998:393). That may be so. Nevertheless, to list *teachers* explicitly fits well the importance Ephesians placed on knowledge, wisdom, and insight (cf., e.g., 1:17–18; 3:14–19; 4:13–14). “Teachers” are mentioned in the earlier list in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and thus played a role in the very early stages of Pauline church life as well. Their importance as guardians of the apostolic “deposit,” as the pastoral letters put it (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:14), increased exponentially in the postapostolic period. If we think of the author of Ephesians as one such teacher, then we see that they were guardians and also inspired developers of the apostolic legacy.

There is not enough information in Ephesians and too ambiguous a set of data outside of Ephesians to allow for more than strong hunches on how ministries and leadership were organized in early churches. There is no mention in Ephesians, for instance, of elders, deacons, or bishops. Furthermore, we cannot be sure that this list of *gifts* reflects a structure of offices for which individuals were ordained, as in the pastoral letters. We can glean from this passage that in the author’s mind these gifts of Christ to the church are of particular importance to the church’s identity and mission. Importantly, the gifts that predominate are those that have to do with preserving and inculcating the apostolic legacy and teaching.

4:12–16 *The Purpose of the Gifts*

A crucial matter in this passage is the relationship of the *gifts* (apostles and others) to the *saints* as a whole. Christ is said to provide the gifts *for the equipment of the saints, for the work of service (ministry), for the building up of the body of Christ*. Notice the different Greek prepositions translated as *for* (Schematic Trans.): the first phrase is introduced by *pros*, the second and third by *eis*.

At issue is whether the second and third phrases depend on the first (so, e.g., Best, 1998:395–9) or whether this is a list of three parallel phrases defining the task the gifts perform (so, e.g., Houlden: 315; Lincoln: 253). If it is the latter, then the *gifts* are in effect the *ministers* who do three things: equip the saints, perform the work of service, and build up the body. Such an interpretation would undergird the practice in the majority of churches up to this day (with varying degrees of clerical definition, to be sure).

If, on the other hand, the two phrases introduced by *eis* indicate the task of the *saints* as a whole rather than only that of the leaders-*gifts*, then an entirely different understanding of church relationships and of

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

ministry emerges. Then the *apostles ... teachers* are there to enable *all the saints together* to do *the work of ministry and to build up the body* (so correctly NRSV and most translations).

Thus on one hand the author is concerned that apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are accorded proper respect as Christ's gifts to the church—the “royal largesse” of the giving Christ (Lincoln: 248). On the other hand, they are also no more and no less than Christ's gift *to the saints* so as to enable *them* to do the work of ministry (Russell: 77). Lincoln, who holds a contrary view of the grammar (see above), believes verses 7 and 16 safeguard the importance of the ministry of all the saints, and that the focus in verse 12 is strictly related to the *apostles ... teachers* (Lincoln: 253). It is preferable, however, to see verse 12 as corroborating the emphasis on *each individual's ministry* in verses 7 and 16 by placing the leaders-*gifts* in verse 11 in proper relation to the *saints* to whom they have been given.

The arena of sports provides a useful analogy. The list of gifts in verse 11 might be seen as the coaches, trainers, team physicians, and equipment handlers. The saints as a whole are the team that does the actual playing. Each member of the team has a role to play for which he or she is prepared, given direction, and kept in shape by the coaching and training staff. Without the coaches and trainers, the team functions poorly, if at all. Coaches may achieve a remarkable position of authority. Indeed, they require the respect and the deference of the players. But with few exceptions, they are not the players. Without the team, there would be no game, let alone a victory.

Likewise, it is the responsibility of pastors, teachers, and other leaders, to see to it that the team—the *saints*—is completely equipped and functions *together* as a team (NJB aptly translates the phrase as *to knit God's holy people together*). With expert teaching, guidance, watchful care, and encouragement on the part of the leaders-*gifts*, each of the saints functions together with other team members (4:16) to do the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ. That is the “game.”

This analogy has a limitation. It draws too sharp a distinction between coaches and trainers and the team. Both leaders-*gifts* and *saints* are part of one church. Both play the game: apostles, pastors, and teachers as players-coaches, together performing the work of ministry. The analogy is useful, however, in identifying the distinct responsibilities in the church as the author envisions them, while safeguarding the emphasis on the importance of *all the saints* in playing the “game.”

Distinctions between “officials” and the whole of the church appear to have become more pronounced in the author's day than they were in the early years of the church. Only a decade or two after the writing of Ephesians, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, commends a highly stratified leadership model centered on the bishop, to whom everyone is subject, especially the faceless “laity” (e.g., Letters of Ignatius: Eph. 6:2; Magn. 6; 8; Trall. 3.1; 7.2; Philad. 3.2). The present text is often taken to be supportive of this increasing differentiation between clergy and laity (e.g., Best, 1997:172; 1998:399). But others notice the absence of bishops in the list and wonder whether they are deliberately left out as an attempt to reassert a more Pauline notion of ministry (Fischer: 15, 38).

Regardless, in Ephesians we can observe with what skill the distinction between leadership and the church as a whole is both acknowledged and qualified at the same time. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are to be held in high esteem, consistent with instructions given by Paul in the earliest extant letter:

We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. (1 Thess. 5:12–13)

Nevertheless, in Ephesians as in 1 Thessalonians, *ministry or service* is entrusted to *all* the members of the church (Elias: 214–23). Ephesians addresses *both* those who are Christ's gift to the church *and* the members of the church are addressed in Ephesians. Leaders and teachers truly are Christ's gifts, but they have been given for the sake of the ministry of all the saints! It might have become quite necessary to make this point for leaders at the time this letter was written. It is a message also to members of the church who are tempted to translate deference to leaders into their own insignificance. To see oneself as not a minister is to betray the ecclesiology of this letter, and with it the costly work of Christ.

At the same time, this text is a clear message to those saints whose sense of self-importance leads them to disparage the *gifts*. First, they lack appreciation for the apostolic roots of the faith. Second, they

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

lack respect for those whose task it is to guard, nurture, and develop the faith and the church's fidelity to it. That too betrays the vision of this letter.

To Equip the Saints for Ministry 4:12

Equipment (*katartismos*) appears in noun form only here in the NT. In verbal form it means "to put in order," "restore," or "complete" (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 6:1), or more generally "to prepare," "make," or "create" (cf. Rom. 9:22). The noun is used, for example, for "setting a bone," and thus carries overtones of equipping in the sense of restoring, binding, training, and discipline. This rich resonance should not be overlooked in light of the predominant metaphor of the body (see esp. 4:4, 16).

The *gifts* are to *equip* the saints for *ministry*. *Ministry* translates *diakonia*, which for our purpose is more accurately translated as *service*, even demeaning service. *Diakonia* acquired noble associations only through identification with early Christian leaders like Paul, who emulated their Servant-Lord Jesus. In time the term became caught up, ironically to be sure, in the struggles for power and authority, eventually losing its moorings in humble service and becoming perhaps the most important designation for Christian leadership. Hence the confusion among scholars on how to interpret this verse.

In Ephesians, this confusion has not yet set in. The leaders of the church are to enable all to offer *service*, to engage in *ministry*. Such servanthood requires resilience, energy, and fitness. It also requires models who remember that they themselves have no better teacher than the Christ who washed feet and in the end went to the cross. Paul knew that (see esp. 2 Cor.); Ephesians wants to remind both leaders-*gifts* and the other *saints* of that (cf. 2:13–18; 5:2, 25).

To Arrive at the Fullness of Christ 4:13–14

The goal of ministry is for *all* believers to *arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the perfect man, at the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*. The ministry of building up the body of Christ (4:12) is to be exercised *until all of us* arrive at Christ.

An element intrinsic to the vision underlying Ephesians comes to expression here. The conjunction *until* makes it clear that even though the church is already the *body* (cf. 4:12) and the *fullness* of Christ (cf. 1:23; cf. 3:19), all the energies and gifts at work in and among the saints are to be put to work so that we *all* might *together arrive* at that *fullness*. *Ministry* has to do with becoming what we already are.

This apparent contradiction—"already/not yet"—is an essential component of Pauline eschatology and ethics. To relax either element in this tension threatens the church's faithfulness. The church is *already* the incarnation of Christ (2:15) and thus participates in the messianic task of *gathering up all things in Christ* (1:10). But the church is *not yet* all that it can and will be. The *saints* must be conscious of the fact that they must draw on the *gifts* of Christ to live up to their identity as Christ's body, and to grow more fully into that identity.

When placed alongside each other, verses 12, 15, and 16 produce an almost absurd but illuminating picture: The body is to arrive at its head. It is to grow into the head to which it is already connected and by which it is defined. And it is to grow into the head from which it receives its growth.

The goal of ministry is defined in a number of ways. The first is to *arrive together at the unity of the faith*. In this case *the faith* is a better translation than "fidelity," as much as being faithful to each other and to God is an essential part of how the body grows together into Christ (4:16; notes on 1:1; 2:5, 8; 6:16). *The faith* is also here a better translation than "trust" in God, as much as that is an essential component of salvation (2:8, notes). Here the view is on the unity of the church as it is constituted and preserved by holding to and rehearsing shared convictions (cf. 4:5).

More is at stake, however, than common assent to a set of propositions or doctrines. This unity is identified as shared knowledge of the Son of God. In 3:17, 19, *knowledge of the unknowable love of Christ* is a result of Christ *dwelling in the hearts* of believers. To "know," as anyone trained in the Scriptures would have known, means to *experience*, to become *one flesh*, in this case with Christ (cf. 5:31).

The intensity of this identification is indicated by the goal of arriving (lit.) *into the perfect man*. In this phrase, *anēr*, the gender-specific term for an adult male, suggests an intense identification with Christ and should not be read as an idealization of maleness per se (1:13; Russell: 82–3; Barth, 1974:441, 484–7,

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

who also sees connections to the marriage motif of 5:25–32). NIV, NRSV, and other translations render this phrase as *maturity*, contrasting it to *children* (lit., *infants*) in verse 14 (also Lincoln: 256, who nevertheless wants to retain the primary sense of the church's *corporate* maturity).

A contrast is no doubt implied between verses 13 and 14. However, as the preceding reference to *the Son of God* and the subsequent phrase *the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* indicate, *the perfect man* is none other than Jesus Christ. In chapter 2, Christ re-creates hostile humanity into *one body*, into *one new human* (*anthrōpos*). Here the process is described from the other direction. By his gifts Christ has enabled the church to arrive at himself, *the perfect man* (so also with some hesitation, Best, 1998:402).

Perfect (*teleios*) can certainly imply *mature*, as most translators render it. To speak of arriving at *the perfect man* would then be the equivalent to arriving at what in the next phrase is called *the stature of the fullness of Christ*. Everything in that understanding is consistent with the “developmental ecclesiology” of Ephesians. However, without claiming anything more than common vocabulary, it is worth noticing that the term appears in Matthew 5:48, where “perfect” (*teleios*) refers to God's righteousness as expressed in enemy love, a perfection, moreover, that is to be imitated by all who would be sons and daughters of God (Matt. 5:45).

In Ephesians, Christ, *the Son of God*, has already been introduced as the embodiment of enemy love (2:11–22). His perfection in love finds its fulfillment in the creation of a new humanity *in himself* (2:15). In Christ, humanity regains its perfection, as at creation. In Christ, the *fullness* of God (3:19) and the *fullness* of humanity (1:23; 2:15) meet. This *perfect man* becomes the goal for those who already constitute his body. Whereas the church is “already” the *fullness* of Christ (1:23), its ministry is geared to having it arrive at a *fullness* that is “not yet” perfect. How better to reach that goal than to practice the enemy-loving perfection of God's Christ?

Readers are jolted into an awareness of the vulnerability they experience this side of perfection, as verse 14 indicates. For all the power at work in members of the body of Christ (notes for 1:19–20 and 3:14–21), Gentile believers as “toddlers in the walk” are still vulnerable to the deceitful wiles and teachings of ill-intentioned persons. Such deceit is part and parcel of the strategies of the devil himself (cf. 6:11), here served by human cunning (the image is taken from dishonest dice playing; Best, 1998:405). This does not refer explicitly to persons in the church, but it is strongly suggested (cf. Col. 2:22, where the same terminology is employed in warning about false teaching).

Thus, while growing into Christ is much more than a matter of right belief, of adherence to *the faith*, matters of right belief are of great concern to the writer. At issue is the survival of the church as the presence of a Christ whose mission is to reconcile all of reality to God. We see here the flip side of the emphasis on the church as Christ's body. For the church to fail to hold to a *faithful* unity (4:1–6)—for the corporate body to disintegrate into a plurality of toddlers being pushed in any number of directions by gusts of ill wind (cf. 2:1–3)—imperils the mission of Christ to gather up all things in himself and in the process to create humanity anew.

There is an element of stark realism in this terse image of being adrift at sea. For all the generosity that pervades Ephesians, for all its celebration of the universal scope of God's grace, the author firmly believes that there are ideas and modes of life leading to shipwreck (*tossed to and fro by waves*; so also REB; cf. 4:17–19!). Ephesians has little of the polemical ambience of some earlier Pauline letters (e.g., Gal., 1–2 Cor.) and the writer's vision is irenic to the core, but this urgent note of warning must not be overlooked in a discussion of unity. Given the image of infants tossed about on the turbulent seas of life, empathy more than blame is in the mind of the author with respect to these still new believers. There is also an implicit message to the leadership of the church regarding the gravity of its task in outfitting the church for its vulnerable voyage.

The emphasis on unity in the faith and growth into oneness with Christ, coupled with warnings of what can arrest development, may be occasioned by the kind of church the author envisions. That church is made up of those who were once strangers and outsiders, of groups typically in conflict with each other, and of those whose former way of life was the opposite of what God intended (e.g., 2:1–3; 4:17–19). If such a church continues to grow by the incorporation of ever-new reconciled enemies, it will always be made up of those who are vulnerable to losing their way. Because of their newness to the faith and the novelty of the peace they share, they will be easy prey for deceit of all kinds.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

A missionary peace church as envisioned in 2:11–22 will by its nature always have vulnerable “babies” who will need to grow with the guidance of the gifts Christ gives (4:11, notes). Having said that, notice that vulnerability to deceit and false teaching is something all share—*so that we might no longer be infants*. This is both pastoral solidarity of the Jewish writer with his Gentile readers and a frank recognition that such vulnerability marks the life of all believers who have not yet arrived fully at Christ.

To Grow into Christ 4:15–16

Verse 15 returns to the positive goal of growing into Christ. The participle *being truthful* (*alētheuontes*) is a verb form of *truth* (*alētheia*) and could be translated as “truthing.” While NIV and NRSV translate it as *speaking the truth*, some translations rightly wish to extend its meaning beyond *speaking* (e.g., NJB, *living by the truth*; REB, *maintaining the truth*). *Being truthful* incorporates both speaking and acting. Such *truthing* stands in immediate contrast to the falsity that puts believers adrift on the stormy sea. Just as coming to unity in Christ (4:13) enables believers no longer to be infants tossed about on the rough seas of deceptive teaching, so truth-full existence becomes the way to grow into Christ.

Truthing most certainly includes speaking “with integrity.” But its horizon extends much beyond personal honesty (cf. 4:21, 25; 6:14). *Truthing* means *professing the truth* (NAB) rehearsed in the first three chapters of Ephesians (cf. 4:4–6). It thus stands in direct contrast to the deliberate deception of cunning false teachers (4:14). It means *speaking the truth* (NRSV), first of all proclaiming the gospel to each other (Best, 1998:407), but surely also to the powers, announcing the *multivariied wisdom of God* to the rulers and authorities on high (3:10). It means also *living by the truth* (NJB), maintaining the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God (4:13).

Such speaking and acting is not *truthful* unless it is done *in love*. *In love* appears frequently in Ephesians (1:4; 3:17; 4:2, 16; 5:2). *Love* is the means by which truth comes into the community [*“In”*]. Since we recognize the Creator’s designs for all of creation and the love that drives and shapes those designs (cf. 2:4!), we know that truth and love are indivisible (4:25, notes). Thus for believers, “ultimately, at the heart of the proclamation of the truth is love, and a life of love is the embodiment of the truth” (Lincoln: 260; cf. Best, 1998:407; Russell: 79–80; Schnackenburg: 191).

Living by, in, and for the truth is the means of *growing in every way* (or *in all things*; both can translate *ta panta*) *into Christ, who is the head* [*“Head”*]. In this instance most translators and interpreters prefer *in every way* (NRSV; *in all things*, NIV; similarly Barth, 1974:444; Best, 1998:408; Lincoln: 260; Schnackenburg: 191; Gnilka: 218). *Ta panta* is elsewhere translated *all things*, a typical way the author of Ephesians likes to refer to the cosmos and all that is in it (4:10; cf. 1:10–11, 23; 3:9). Some interpreters then translate the phrase as *causing all things to grow into the head—Christ*, in which *to grow* is treated as a transitive verb (notably Schlier, 1965:680–1; 1971:190).

In such a reading, the verse would point to the missionary task of the church as participation in the *gathering up of all things in (to) Christ* (cf. 1:10). Some perceive this interpretation to be an imperialistic and triumphalistic understanding of the church that is unbecoming the author’s ecclesiology (e.g., Barth, 1974:444–5; Schnackenburg: 191; Schlier, 1965:681, admits that it does sound like that). There is, however, no good reason to dismiss such a reading on those grounds. That the church is a full participant in the messianic project is implicit in calling the church Christ’s *body*—a notion explored as profoundly in Ephesians as anywhere.

The terseness of the language is not intended to suggest an easy universalism, anymore than does 1:10 (notes). But neither does it allow a restriction to only an “intensive” notion of the church’s growth (contra, e.g., Best, 1998:408; Lincoln: 260–1; Schnackenburg: 191).

The image of *head* and *body* may be a blending of two originally independent traditions, one of Christ as head of the cosmic body (as in Col. 1:16–18), the other of the church as Christ’s body (as in 1 Cor. 12 and Rom. 12; Best, 1998:195; Lincoln: 262). The combination of cosmos and church is already present in Colossians, however, which indicates that these traditions had been combined before the writing of this letter. *Head* carries implications of authority (cf. esp. 1:22), but also of source (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3, 7) [*“Head”*]. Here both ideas are present. As *head*, Christ is the *governing goal* of the church’s growth (cf. 4:13); as *head*, Christ is also the *source* of the church’s identity, task, and empowerment (4:7–12), as well as of its growth (4:16; lit., *out of whom*).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Verse 16 is as grammatically difficult as it is uncommonly rich in meaning. The bewildering complexity appears to result from the intention on the part of the author to bring this passage to a climactic summation. The terms *each one* and *measure* in verse 7 reappear to form an *inclusio* (marking a section by repeating a beginning word or phrase at the end). Grammatically, the verse is dependent on the previous assertion that Christ is the *head* (4:15), while the focus of the verse is now on the *body*. Further, the vocabulary of Colossians 2:19 is integrated into the complex sentence and expanded with some medical vocabulary related to joints and ligaments (though we cannot be sure what these terms actually mean; Best, 1998:411).

Two words with the prefix *sun-* (*with/together with*), *joined together* (*sunarmologoumenon*; cf. 2:21) and *knit together* (*sumbibazomenon*), recall similar strings of *sun-* compound words in 2:5–6, 21–22, and 3:6, drawing attention to the interrelationship of believers with each other and with Christ. Though in 2:21 *joined together* functions in the architectural image of a building, here it is combined with the similar *knit together* to depict the organic growth of a body. Even so, the individual does not disappear from view. The availability to individual believers of God's power as well as Christ's "sourcing" of the body is reasserted in the final clause: *Each individual contributes to growth* (cf. 4:15) *according to the energy* (cf. esp. 3:20) *appropriate to* (lit., *in [the] measure of*) *each part* (paralleling 4:7, *according to the measure of the gift of Christ given to each one of us*). To sum up, the church's *growth* is to happen *in love* (cf. 4:15, notes).

The phrase *for the purpose of building itself up* is particularly puzzling. Perhaps it should be translated *into his building*, as some manuscripts allow (Schematic Trans.). The two alternatives are closely related. The one has the church *building itself up in love* as it becomes more and more Christlike (the identical *eis oikodomēn* is used in 4:12). The image of the organic growth of a body controls such an interpretation. The alternative translates *oikodomē*, not as building up, but as *a building*, a term already used in connection with *joined together* (*sunarmologoumenon*) in 2:21 to describe the church as God's holy temple. Christ creates in himself a new human who is to serve as God's own home; the church as his body also participates in the construction of that temple.

Grammar is evidently the small price paid for such a successful compression of central themes and imagery. The gist remains clear: Christ the head gives the body, the church, what it needs to grow in love into a new humanity—into Christ. Notice also that, in keeping with Paul's vision in 1 Corinthians 12, special emphasis is given to the importance of *each individual part* for the growth of the whole body.

The effect of 4:16, as of the whole of verses 7–16, is that the exhortation of the following chapters is always addressed to the whole church as a corporate reality. Unity is the premise and objective of the exhortation. At the same time, *each individual* believer is to hear and respond to the challenge directed to the whole *body*. Not surprisingly, the challenge to *hold each other up in love* (4:2) lies at the heart of the opening exhortation to unity in verses 1–3.

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Affinity to Colossians is again evident: Ephesians 4:2–3 appears to be dependent on Colossians 3:12–14, verse 4 on Colossians 3:15, and verse 16 on Colossians 2:19. Indeed, much of Colossians 3:1–17 is taken up, reworked, and reordered in Ephesians 4:1–5:20, as will be seen also in following sections of text.

Unity

Few passages in the NT are as eloquent in their call for unity as are these verses. The high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 is the only other text used as frequently to give a scriptural warrant for the church's struggle for unity. I have already drawn attention to John 17 ("Prayer," TBC for 3:14–21). Both texts stress the central importance of unity for the identity and mission of the church.

In the case of Jesus' prayer (John 17), such unity means fidelity to and participation in the divine Word become flesh. The unity of the Father and the Son becomes the measure of the union believers are to have with each other and especially with God and his Christ. In Ephesians 4, unity means fidelity to the apostolic and prophetic foundation; it means being *chained together in peace* (4:3); it especially means *growing together into Christ* (4:16) and thereby into union with God (4:6).

Such unity requires deliberate and energetic adherence to *the faith*. In both the Gospel of John and Ephesians, the call for unity is understood to have the potential to cause renewed division. When unity is to be found specifically in union with Christ, then who that Christ is believed to be also becomes a critical

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

point of division (the Johannine letters illustrate this for that community; the pastoral letters for the Pauline churches). Unity is always more than unity among people, even Christians. The unity for which Jesus prays in John 17 and to which Ephesians 4 exhorts is the unity of all together *with and in Christ*.

Unity Virtues

To be one with Christ is to participate in his mode of being. This accounts for the central place of the virtues of unity—*humility, gentleness, and patience*.

In Judaism, the “piety of the poor” valued *humility* as the proper stance of the believer. God has a special preference for the poor, and so those who want to enjoy God’s favor need to humble themselves (Grundmann, 1972:6, 11–15; cf. esp. the Beatitudes in Matt. 5:3–12; 1QS 4.2–6). However, in the wider Hellenistic world, such humbling of oneself was seen more as humiliation, self-denigration, and servility unbecoming of self-respecting free persons (Grundmann, 1972: 1–5).

In the Pauline view, such a slavelike stance is precisely what makes church life possible. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in Philippians 2:3–11, where Christ himself models such *humility* by choosing the form of an obedient slave over equality with God. In Ephesians, it is the servile captive of that Christ (4:1) who calls on believers to make themselves slaves to each other, prisoners to each others’ needs. That is their high calling, just as it was for Christ and for their apostle (3:8; cf. 1 Cor. 4:8–13 and 2 Cor. 4:7–12). They have been empowered for humble servanthood (cf. 5:21).

Gentleness is a virtual synonym of *humility* in Christian usage, but in wider Greek use it communicates friendliness more than servility. By placing these two terms next to each other, the self-denigration suggested with *humility* is mitigated by the *gentleness* expected of friends. Such use of vocabulary is consistent with earlier Pauline letters. In 1 Corinthians 4:20–21, for example, Paul places “gentleness” opposite “the rod” as alternative ways for him to exercise power in relation to the Corinthians. *Gentleness* is one of the manifestations of divine empowerment, one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23.

Patience, also listed by Paul in Galatians 5:22 as one of the fruits of the Spirit, literally means “long temper” (as opposed to “short temper”; Lincoln: 236; Thurston: 123). An essential element of community, it refers to the ability to put up with each other. If, however, such patience is to be anything other than a stoic “putting up with,” it needs to be a *chosen* disposition of respect and love for the sister and the brother.

Gifts

The most immediate point of both contact and contrast is with other Pauline texts that deal with “gifts”—Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 (Eph. 4:11, notes). The following renders the three texts literally:

Rom. 12:6–8

having gifts (*charismata*)

that differ according to the

grace (*charis*) given to us,

prophecy

ministry (*diakonia*)

prophecy

1 Cor. 12:8–10, 28

given through the Spirit

a word of wisdom

a word of knowledge

faith

gifts (*charismata*) of healing

faith

Eph. 4:11

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

one teaches	works of power	
another exhorts	prophecy	
another shares	discernment of spirits	
another leads	various kinds of tongues	
another shows mercy	interpretation of tongues	
	[...]	[Christ] himself
	God has appointed	gave
	first apostles	apostles
	second prophets	prophets
	third teachers	evangelists
	then miracles	pastors
	gifts (<i>charismata</i>) of healing	teachers
	helping	
	administration	
	kinds of tongues	

Careful comparison reveals that in Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8–10, the important word is *gifts* (*charismata*, related to *charis*, “grace” or “gift”). The lists show a diversity of gifts, with little apparent attention to whether they are given to only some persons then recognized as holding an “office.” Most scholars believe correctly that *function* rather than *office* marks these passages. Even 1 Corinthians 12:28, which appears initially to rank church officials, continues the list after *teachers* with functions rather than with the functionaries themselves. The impression is clearly left that everyone in the church has some gift for the common good (12:7).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Despite the emphasis on gifts and grace in Ephesians 4:7, the term *charismata*, “gracious gifts,” is absent from Ephesians. Does this suggest that Ephesians represents a development away from the early “charismatic” church life to more organized and defined church “offices,” as many argue? Perhaps so. That is of less significance, however, than how Ephesians engages this increasing institutionalization. Our analysis in the notes has shown that the author views the gifts—however specialized in defined roles—as enabling the *whole* church to practice its ministry of building up the body.

The Peaceable Warrior

Psalms 68:18 is not the only war-text that is used and transformed in Ephesians. Isaiah 59:17 will be taken up in 6:14–17 and radically transformed (6:10–20, notes). Biblical traditions were appropriated with great creativity in light of the surprising gift of Christ. In Ephesians, such appropriation and transformation takes place particularly in light of the special grace toward those once on the outside, the Gentiles. Such freedom to adapt stands in some contrast to the carefulness a commentator exercises to recapture as closely as possible the intentions and meanings of biblical texts. However ironic, without such care, the bracing freedom and inspired creativity of biblical writers observed in such reworking of biblical texts would go unnoticed. In this way, careful and meticulous exegesis becomes the pursuit of the wondrous ways of the Spirit.

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Unity and Peace

We discover in verse 3 a pacifism eager to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is a pacifism, moreover, that exhibits itself in the irenic and ironic energy and power of meekness. Meekness-values are historically endemic to the culture of Anabaptist piety. Today, however, they are often suspect as displaying weakness or at least reluctance to become involved. For the most part, the phrase “*die Stillen im Lande*” (“the quiet in the land,” as applied to churches separated from larger society) is increasingly an epithet, not a compliment.

In Ephesians, meekness and patience are the mode in which the high calling of God’s sons and daughters is lived out. Can humility and deference be recovered by a generation increasingly distant from the culture of meekness? Our text suggests that the unity of the church depends on such pacifism.

Unity and Diversity of Belief

At the same time, unity as envisioned in Ephesians 4 is not simply the result of deference to the opinions of others, least of all the avoidance of conflict over fundamental issues of faith and practice. Such a unity would not be the unity of *faith*, but the unity of fools tossed about by every wind of human teaching (4:14). God-given unity is brought about by the wind of God, the Spirit (4:3). It is a unity of adherence to the *one body*, the *one Lord*, and the *one God*. It is, further, a unity that goes beyond the microcosm of the local congregation. This letter is written quite consciously to the church as a whole.

A double-edged challenge emerges at this point. On one hand, the sectarianism of the believers church tradition, as that designation suggests, has resulted from making adherence to the one Lord in both belief and practice the test of unity. The effect has often been to make the circle of unity tight. The smaller the circle, the greater the faithfulness and the more intense the unity—an understandable rationale. We know from Anabaptist history that when such circles of unity become too tight and too small, unity becomes suffocating uniformity, not the unity of the *reconciling* body of the cosmic Christ.

Ephesians is sympathetic to drawing the line sharply between truth and falsehood, between light and darkness, both in matters of belief (4:4–6) and practice (4:17–5:21). At the same time, its vision of the church as the reconciled body of the one who is *gathering up all things* (1:10) at the behest of the one who is *Father of all families* (3:14) condemns all *intentional* sectarianism. In other words, being labeled a sect or a minority may be the predictable result of faithfulness to Christ. But for those who follow and embody the Christ who is engaged in re-creating humanity as a whole, such a status is at best a *lamented* effect of faithfulness. The church must have the courage to be “separate,” but only for purposes of the larger inclusion of all things. In short, a smug minority sells short the all-embracing reach of Christ’s reconciliation.

Our text also stands in critical relationship to the “catholicism” that came after the writing of Ephesians. Notwithstanding its service as a proof-text for such efforts, it also asks critical questions about attempts at organizational and structural unity. The stress in our text is on unity made possible and enlivened by the

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Spirit (4:3) and defined by adherence to the sevenfold “ones” (4:4–6). Unity born of the lowest common denominator is thus no more faithful to the vision represented here than is a smug separatism.

Leadership and Empowerment

With respect to ministry, our text has been read from early times in quite different ways. Some have read it as supporting a clearly defined leadership stratum in the church, as can be seen in the Roman Catholic and Reformation traditions (Schnackenburg: 328–31, surveys the history of interpretation). Others have read it through the lens of 1 Corinthians 12 and thus interpret it in an egalitarian way. One might characterize this as the tension between spiritual gift (as in 1 Cor. 12) and office. Still others, as do I, read the text as *reflecting* an emerging officialdom in the church, but *engaging* that development critically in the light of Christ. As such, the text offers some important challenges to contemporary churches, regardless of where they find themselves structurally on the gift-office spectrum.

In the believers church tradition, for example, there are various models. At one end of the spectrum are congregations with a single pastor as CEO, religious expert, and jack-of-all-trades (J. H. Yoder, 1987:5, 59). At the other end is egalitarianism, with all members sharing in ministry. In such congregations, leadership may be ill-defined or at most strictly functional and temporary, as in some fellowships and house-churches (for helpful studies of models of ministry in the believers church tradition, see J. H. Yoder, 1987; Bauman; D. B. Eller; Esau; Lebold: 24–31; Toews: 217–37).

Most congregations inhabit the large and fluid middle ground: ministry happens through a professional ministerial staff, an array of committees, and the informal efforts of members generally. Leadership (usually exercised by “ministers,” egalitarian disclaimers notwithstanding) is often heavily bureaucratized at both congregational and denominational levels. Leaders are as often as not chosen for their skills at, and training for, getting jobs done. Often endangered, absent, or unacknowledged is leadership (paid or unpaid, professionally trained or experientially forged) that is grounded in character, piety, or spirituality (as endowed by the Spirit and expressed in a life of humble self-sacrifice to the church).

The frequently conflictual relationships between congregations and their pastors over questions of leadership and expectations of ministry are born of a volatile mix. First, members may have a lingering memory of other more participatory albeit also more authoritarian models, such as an unpaid multiple ministry of elders—“the bench.” Second, congregations may express a burgeoning demand for competent and trained professional pastoral staff. Third, members may have a matching wariness of any expertise that would disenfranchise “ordinary” members of the congregation. Fourth, they usually have a shared sense, regardless of where persons or congregations find themselves on the spectrum, that getting the relationships and structures of ministry right goes to the heart of being a faithful church.

How does our text relate to these concerns? Great respect is shown in Ephesians 4 for those entrusted with the leadership of the church. They are nothing less than the *gifts* the *head* gives to the *body*. Do congregations accord their leadership the grateful reception befitting Christ’s gifts? The temptation not to do so is as old as the church and is addressed in the earliest of NT writings (cf., e.g., 1 Thess. 5:12–13; 2 Cor. 8–12).

Pastors and other leaders might ask themselves the equally hard question: Do we see ourselves and comport ourselves as Christ’s gifts? For such a relationship between leaders and congregations to be present, our text insists, such leaders must see themselves as *at least* gifts of Christ but also *no more* than gifts for the ministry of *all* the saints (4:12–16, notes on analogy of coaching staff).

For this to be true, *leadership* and *ministry* must not be treated as synonyms. Stated differently, leadership is only one specific form of ministry. As exercised by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, leadership is the ministry of enablement (cf. 3:7; cf. 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 6:3–4). Leaders offer service or ministry as they enable the whole body, more specifically each and all of its individual parts together, to perform the ministry of building up the body of Christ. This does not exclude leaders from participating in the broader ministry of the body. As “player coaches,” they enable others by modeling what selfless and caring ministry looks like. But as leaders, their participation in the ministry of the saints as a whole (4:12) finds its characteristic expression in enabling and equipping all the saints.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Diversity of expertise is mandatory (4:12–16, notes on sports team). There is room and need for the specific skills we today identify with professional expertise. But the fact remains unchanged that *ministry* is as comprehensive and as diverse a task as are the individual parts together constituting a body.

Authority and Servanthood

Can authority and servanthood coexist in the same person(s)? The answer *must* be yes if Christ is to be the model for leaders. Paul understood well that this issue goes to the heart of what it means, not a complete inventory of s to confess that the one who took on the form of a slave is “Lord” (Phil. 2:5–11). It goes to the heart of Paul’s apostleship as a slave of the congregations for which he was responsible (1 Cor. 4). A servant-leader, a “slave-lord,” was difficult for the Corinthians to accept then (2 Cor. 10–13); it is almost impossible for congregations to accept today, just as it is for their leaders who are taught to view themselves as experts, consultants, and CEOs.

Then as now, the concept of a leader who is truly a servant rubs hard against prevailing assumptions about how expertise goes together with income, power, and status. Even if one should be wary of the centralization of ministerial tasks in the one hired pastor, priest, or “minister” (J. H. Yoder, 1987:1–8), it may be, ironically, that it is the jack-of-all-trades who is in the best position to express such servanthood.

Even so, to relax *either* servanthood *or* authority in this tension-filled image fundamentally subverts Christ’s lordship, renders Jesus and his apostle Paul unintelligible, and subverts this text’s ability to renew the church’s ministry. If we relax the tension between authority and servanthood, it will render the ministry of the leaders a betrayal of the Lord in whose name they exercise leadership. It will also render the church unable to recognize and acknowledge the leadership and ministry of true servants in its midst who fall outside the definitions of professional competence and training.

Leaders as Diverse Gifts

The list of *gifts* in verse 11 is, of course, not a complete inventory of leadership functions nor is it intended to be (contra Best, 1998:393). Even if we restrict ourselves to the larger collection of Pauline letters, we find other leader-*gifts*: “bishops” (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7), “elders” (1 Tim. 5:1–2, 17–21; cf., e.g., Acts 20:17; 21:18), “deacons” (male and female; e.g., Rom. 16:1; Phil. 1:1), “presidents” (male and female; Rom. 16:2; 1 Thess. 5:12), and “widows” (1 Tim. 5:3–16). Various church traditions have institutionalized these diverse *gifts*, functions, or offices in different ways.

Our text shows little if any interest in the issue of structure or institution. Instead, it asks whether those who inhabit the various functions or offices serve to empower a church made up of a host of diverse individuals, enabling them together as a body to perform the work of ministry of building up the body of Christ. That is the far more important question than which structure a church has.

Structures themselves do little to empower. The most egalitarian structures can suffocate the growth and mission of the church if they inhibit or even prohibit the exercise of the diverse ministries, one of which is leadership. Conversely, those who exercise their structure-given authority as slaves of the people can wonderfully subvert the most hierarchical and ostensibly oppressive structures. This text forces *all* to reorient themselves *together* to build up the body until *all together* arrive at the unity of the Son of God, at the fullness of Christ.

Discipleship and Mission

The *head* into which the *body* grows is *Christ*, the one in whom *all things* and *all people* are being gathered (1:10), the one in whom both *the near* and *the far* are gathered and made into one new humanity (2:13–18). This means that the growth envisioned in verse 13 is *intensive* (discipleship) and also necessarily *extensive* (mission).

This passage must not be read apart from the great peace text in 2:11–22. The church grows into the Christ who is peace (2:14) to the degree to which it participates in the healing of the cosmos in all its dimensions. This includes reconciliation between warring peoples, reconciliation of the alienated and lost with their loving divine parent, restoring people to their full humanity, and not least the reconciliation of *all things* with God in Christ.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Such a view welcomes the impatience of various church-growth movements to see persons find God. But it is deeply suspicious of any notion of church that would betray the *inclusive* nature of the church racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically (Yoder Neufeld, 1999a:69–82). A church that is homogeneous *by design* is no longer the body of the Christ who fuses enemies and strangers into *one new humanity* (2:15), nor is it the church of the one who is *Father of all families* (3:14–15, TRYN).

A church insensitive to attempts at healing conflicts in the world (peacemaking or peacebuilding, justice-making, conflict resolution, mediation, hunger relief, and development) and to the need for restoring a spoiled earth (ecology)—that church is not growing into the Christ in (to) whom *all things* are being gathered (1:10). On the other hand, a church callous to the fate of unforgiven, unreconciled, and spiritually unrestored persons is also not growing into the Christ whose peace-work opens up access to God, membership in God’s family, and the joy of worship in the presence of God (2:18–22; 5:18–20).

We urgently need a vision of mission as integrated as the one that informs Ephesians. In this vision, peace with God and peace on earth are experienced, understood, articulated, witnessed to, and struggled for as one seamless whole, woven on the loom of God’s gracious, loving, and mysterious will (cf. Eph. 1).

Ephesians 4:17–5:2

The Old and the New Human: Two Ways of Walking

PREVIEW

It is rather artificial to break up 4:1–5:21 into distinct sections. Even so, we are helped by stylistic and thematic features to mark off distinct parts of the text for the sake of manageability. Ephesians 4:17 repeats the *therefore (oun)* initiating the exhortation section in 4:1 (reduced by NIV to *so*, and by NRSV to *now*), thus taking up the exhortation in earnest with an emphatic appeal: *Walk* (NIV and NRSV: *live*) *no longer as the Gentiles do!* The section concludes in 5:2 with an equally emphatic *Walk in love as did Christ! Walk*, as in 2:1–10, serves as an *inclusio* (marking a section by repeating a beginning word or phrase at the end).

Adding to this frame is the contrast between Gentiles *handing themselves over* to vice (4:19) and Christ *handing himself over* to God as an act of sacrificial worship (5:2). The focus of contrasting lifestyles is not brought to a close at 5:2 (cf. *walk* in 5:8, 15, in addition to further contrasts), but the striking contrast between “two ways of walking” serves as a useful theme under which to consider this section of Ephesians.

The contrast between the two modes of life is sharpened here in two ways. First, 4:20–24 challenges readers to recall their baptism as a ritual of *taking off* or *putting off the old human* (*the old anthrōpos*) and *putting on the new human* (*the new anthrōpos*)—Christ. Second, verses 25–32 illustrate life in *the new human* with exhortations on truth-telling, anger, theft, speech, and grieving the Holy Spirit. Prohibited behavior is contrasted with what should replace it. The contrast is sharpened further in verses 31 and 32 with lists of vices and virtues, likely drawn from Colossians 3:8, 12–13. The first two verses of chapter 5 bring the exhortation to a climax with the call to imitate God and to *walk* like Christ. We hear an echo of 4:1 with its call to *walk in a way worthy of God’s calling*.

Here is a summary of the many contrasts in this passage:

the old human

the new human

decaying

being renewed

walking like the Gentiles

imitating God

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

walking like the Gentiles	walking in love as Christ
who have given themselves up	who gave himself up
to every unclean work	for us
alienated from the life of God	forgiven and loved children of God
ignorance	learning
empty mind	renewed in the spirit
darkened thinking	of the mind
the lie	the truth
every evil	the good
stealing	working with one's own hands
rotten language	truthful and grace-full language
bitter, angry, and wrangling	kind, compassionate, and forgiving

As to structure, verses 17–19 form one sentence, as do verses 20–24. Verses 25–32 are shorter sentences exhorting to various kinds of behavior.

Structure of 4:17–5:2

For this reason I testify in the Lord—

You are no longer to walk as Gentiles. (4:17–19)

You did not so learn Christ, the truth in Jesus.

You are to have taken off the old human

and to have put on the new human. (4:20–24)

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Therefore, having “taken off” the lie—

- Speak truth with the neighbor.
- Be angry, but do not sin.
- No longer steal, rather give to those who need.
- No rotten words, rather impart grace.
- Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
- Let all vices [list] be removed from you.
- Rather be like God in Christ [list of virtues]. (4:25–32)

Therefore, be imitators of God

and walk in love just like Christ. (5:1–2)

OUTLINE

On Not Walking Like Gentiles, 4:17–19

Learning Christ by Putting on the New Human, 4:20–24

4:20–21	Learning Christ, the Truth in Jesus
4:22–24	“You Are What You Wear”
No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth, 4:25–32	
4:25	Saying No to the Lie and Speaking Truth
4:26–27	Sinless Anger
4:28–29	Meeting Need with Hands and Words
4:30	On Not Grieving the Holy Spirit
4:31–32	Contrasting Ways of Relating to Others

Imitating God and Walking Like Christ, 5:1–2

EXPLANATORY NOTES

On Not Walking Like Gentiles 4:17–19

This section begins with an emphatic double statement: *For this reason I therefore declare and testify in the Lord*. Notice first that *therefore* appears as it did in 4:1, indicating the resumption of exhortation premised on grace. As the exhortation of 4:1 was premised on God’s grace as explored in the preceding chapters, so now again the exhortation follows necessarily from the rehearsal of Christ as gift-giver and growth-giver (4:7–16).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Testify is a translation of *marturomai*, from which we derive the English term *martyr*. Readers hear the following exhortation as emerging from someone who is a witness *in the Lord* and for that reason is to be heeded. A more intimate tone is set in 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12, where Paul as “father” (2:11) exhorts, encourages, and “testifies to” (*marturomai*) his “children” to “lead a life worthy of God” (cf. Eph. 4:1!). In Ephesians 4:17 the tone is less of parental intimacy and more of apostolic authority. Recall 2 Corinthians 2:17 where Paul speaks as “from God before God in Christ” (TRYN).

As in 4:1, the exhortation has to do with *walking*. This motif first arises in 2:2 (notes; 4:1, notes). Life is not static; it leads somewhere—either to ruin or to *the life of God* (4:18). The direction in which believers are to walk is first suggested by its opposite, the *walk* of the Gentiles. Since most of the recipients of the letter are Gentiles, the use of *Gentile* is here meant to bring to consciousness their former manner of life (cf. 4:22; 2:1–2, 11–12; 5:3–7).

The description of Gentile existence is brutal in both brevity and one-sidedness, owing much to a tradition of Jewish characterizations of Gentile life (TBC). Here its function is to hold up an ugly mirror to the readers, reflecting their former *walk* for purposes of warning, encouragement, and reinforcement of identity. Readers are *no longer* to *walk* as they once did (and presumably are still tempted to do—hence the exhortation). *No longer* fits well the *once-now* schema observed also in chapter 2 (notes) and sets the scene for the baptismal reflections to come in 4:22–24.

Alienation from God and God’s will for human life is first a matter of corrupted consciousness, from which flows corrupt behavior. This is sketched in broad strokes with a string of virtually interchangeable images: the *mind* (*nous*) of such persons who are *alienated from the life of God* (cf. 2:12!) is *futile* (4:17; cf. Rom. 1:21; Wisd. of Sol. 13:1). Their *thinking* (*dianoia*) is *darkened* (cf. again Rom. 1:21; Wisd. of Sol. 17:2–3, 17, 21). “The light has gone out in the seat of Gentiles’ understanding so that they are no longer capable of apprehending ultimate truth” (Lincoln: 277). All this is a result of the *ignorance* residing in them (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14; similarly, Wisd. of Sol. 13:1), a result as much as cause of their alienation from God.

Ignorance thus cannot be claimed as an excuse (cf. Rom. 1:20–22). From a Jewish perspective, Gentile ignorance is culpable ignorance, particularly because of its delusions of knowledge and wisdom (cf. emphasis on delusion in Eph. 4:22; 1 Cor. 1:18–25). The author is not describing “a defect in the ability of his readers to reason” (Best, 1998:417) but an inability or unwillingness to perceive life and its demands in accordance with God’s will.

A parallel to ignorance is, not surprisingly, *hardness of heart* (4:18). The *heart* is a virtual synonym for *mind* in the Bible (1:18, notes). *Hardening* is a frequent biblical way of describing resistance to truth or to God (cf. Mark 6:52; 8:17; John 12:40; Rom. 2:5; 2 Cor. 3:14; the prime example is Pharaoh, Exod. 7–14; Rom 9:18). Such *hardness of heart* (Eph. 4:18) leads strikingly to *callousness*, to a “loss of sensitivity to pain,” as *apalgeō* can be translated literally (4:19; Liddell and Scott)—in this case moral pain. As the NJB translates it, *Their sense of right and wrong [has been] dulled*.

Once such hardening has happened, people *hand themselves over* or *deliver themselves up* to licentiousness, every kind of impure practice, and greed. The similarity to Romans 1 is striking, but there Paul says three times that God has *given up* such persons to a life of dissipation (1:24, 26, 28). The verb *paradidomi* is the same term used of Judas handing Jesus over to the authorities (e.g., Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; John 13). It is the same term used of Jesus in Ephesians 5:2, who *hands himself over* for us as an offering and a sacrifice. Here the term has a tragic and fateful ring to it. These are, after all, the sons and daughters of disobedience, the “walking dead” under the rule of the evil authority of the air (2:1–3). Even so, they have *handed themselves over* to that authority as living yet deadened sacrifices.

Their life is marked by three interrelated categories of vice, all of which appear repeatedly in lists of vices (Best, 1998:422): *licentiousness*, *impurity*, and *greed*. *Licentiousness* or *debauchery* (*aselgeia*) is already linked with *impurity* (*akatharsia*) in 2 Corinthians 12:21 and Galatians 5:19, where both are listed with *fornication* (*porneia*). Jewish and Jewish-Christian believers viewed sexual sin as a representative affront to the holiness of God and characteristic of “unclean” Gentiles and their idolatry (cf., e.g., Wisd. of Sol. 14:26). Tellingly, this trio of vices is echoed in 5:3, 5, with the exception that *fornication* has replaced *licentiousness*.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The concern about *purity* has in this instance less to do with personal spiritual and moral hygiene, as important as that is, than with the fact that Gentile readers are now a part of God's holy temple (2:21–22). God's home cannot abide the defilements of sin (*every unclean work*) so heedlessly engaged in by those whose minds and hearts have become inured to purity and holiness (cf. also 1 Cor. 6:9–20).

Greed (*pleonexia*) here signifies the force that drives *license* and *impurity* (NRSV: *greedy to practice*). Some link it more closely to sex by translating it as *lust* (e.g., NIV). While that restricts its meaning too much, it draws attention to the fact that greed as *insatiability* is at the root of sexual excess as well. In that sense, sexual sin is symbolic of all other greed, the most prevalent being not sexual but economic! Biblically, *all* such greed is closely linked to *idolatry*, as is explicitly the case in 5:5 (cf. Col. 3:5; also Rom. 1:29 in light of Rom. 1:24–25; 1 Cor. 5:9–13; Isa. 2:6–20).

Such a bleak picture of *the Gentiles* might easily play into moral arrogance toward outsiders. However, its purpose here is to hold up a mirror to *the saints*, reminding them of their *former* way of life and regrettably also their *present walk*. This is, after all, exhortation. In this way the finger pointed at them becomes a prophetic/apostolic word reminiscent of the OT, where such a mix of motifs of debauchery, ignorance, darkness, and hardness of heart is used to depict *Israel's* apostasy (cf., e.g., Isa. 59, which furnishes an important background to Eph. 6:10–20).

The author thus attempts to create a chasm between who the readers *once* were and who they are *now* to be. Another example of how such stereotyping of a life of vice could be used *within* the church is found in 2 Peter 2, which characterizes false teachers in much the same way: ignorance, deceit, falsehood, and moral turpitude (Charles: 237–44). In short, the walk of the Gentiles is perilously near for both new and seasoned believers.

Learning Christ by Putting on the New Human 4:20–24

4:20–21 *Learning Christ, the Truth in Jesus*

Pointing a finger at others is not at the heart of the exhortation. Instead, at its heart is a summons to a new life, reminding readers what it means that they were baptized into Christ and thereby have embarked on a course of learning and discipleship. Again, the contrast to the former way of life is stated emphatically: *But you did not so learn Christ*. As Barth puts it, “You have become students of the Messiah” (1974:504). Being faithful believers is a matter of learning how to walk in the school of Christ. The term for *learning* (*manthanō*) is the verb form of *disciple* (*mathētēs*).

The turn of phrase—*learning Christ*—is surprising and indeed unparalleled. Some versions try to clarify it: *learning about Christ* (TEV) or *coming to know Christ* (NIV). Most correctly retain the peculiar *learning Christ*. Similarly, Colossians 2:6–7 combines “receiving” with “being taught.” “As you therefore *received* Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in faith *just as you were taught*, abounding in thanksgiving” (TRYN).

Does “learning Christ” mean learning the tradition “about Christ”? (so Lincoln: 279; Schnackenburg: 199). Yes, but that is too limited. In Colossians, what has been taught and what has been received is a *person* rather than a teaching *about* him—though that surely would not have been excluded from any instruction in the faith. We recall the prominence given to teaching ministries in the gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11. Clearly, teaching is more than imparting facts and dogmas; learning is more than the acquisition of information. It is *growing into Christ* (4:13, 16), becoming more fully a part of Christ as *members of Christ's body* (cf. the similar “Christ being formed in believers,” Gal. 4:19). To *learn Christ* is to encounter and commune with the risen Christ present in the church (so also Best, 1998:426–7). Hence the clause *You were taught in him* (Eph. 4:21).

Verse 21 repeats the clause encountered in 3:2, *if indeed you heard*. Here it is a reminder of what the author can assume has been heard and taught to the recipients of the letter. It is the premise upon which the author builds his appeal (*if indeed you heard and were taught in him*). However, just as in 3:2, the turn of phrase carries an implicit invitation to self-examination. Also as in 3:2, the phrase serves to introduce a major emphasis: there it was to rehearse the content of the apostolic legacy; here it refers to what it means to *learn Christ*.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Believers are said to have been *taught in him*, meaning *in Christ*. *In* can have spatial and instrumental meaning, but can also express agency [*“In”*]. Believers learn *within* Christ as members of his body (1:23; 2:15–16; 3:16–17; 4:15–16); they learn as those who have been raised to life *with* Christ (2:5–6); they are taught to live by what they see *in* Christ; finally, they are taught *by* Christ. We should resist choosing one interpretation over another. Through his example (2:14–18; 5:21–33), his gifts (*apostles ... and teachers*, 4:11), and his Spirit (1:17; 3:5, 16; 4:3–4; note that in 5:18–21, *being subject to each other* is a consequence of *being filled with the Spirit*; cf. 6:4, notes), the risen Lord is himself the teacher of the church.

The following phrase is as puzzling as *learning Christ*. *As truth is in Jesus* ties truth to the specific person of Jesus. It is relatively rare in Pauline letters to refer to *Jesus* without the addition of “Lord” or “Christ” (Rom. 3:26; 8:11; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:10–11, 14; 11:4; Gal. 6:17; Phil. 2:10; 1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14). Surely the author intends to draw specific attention to Jesus in a way “Christ” or “him” would not have accomplished. But why? He may want to point to the content of what is to be learned, in particular the life, death, and resurrection of the man Jesus (Schnackenburg: 199). The evidence is too scanty for us to see the phrase as referring to traditions of Jesus’ sayings and deeds as recorded in the Gospels.

More likely, it refers to the faithfulness of Jesus in giving himself entirely to God and to humanity, to the point of giving the ultimate gift of love, his life (2:14–16; 5:2! cf. Phil. 2:6–11). In other words, *learning Christ* must have content in terms of the life of the man *Jesus*. It is that man who is to be followed (so also Best, 1998:429–30). Such *truth* (known in following Jesus) is vulnerable to being ignored in favor of truths *about* Jesus, which more easily allow believers to avoid the implications of that example for them as participants *in Christ*.

4:22–24 “You are What You Wear”

With three interrelated infinitives, verses 22–24 continue the sentence begun in verse 20. They are sometimes translated as imperatives (e.g., REB), but should be seen as dependent on the verb *you were taught* (so correctly NIV, NRSV, and most versions). The essential gist is as follows: *You were taught, in keeping with the truth which is in Jesus*, first, *to have taken off the old human*, second, *to be renewed in mind*, and third, *to have put on the new human*. The exhortation is thereby inextricably related to the identity believers have in Christ.

One might well choose as rubric for this motif Letty Russell’s “a change of uniform” (81) or the well-known aphorism “You are what you wear.” The specific vocabulary of *taking off* and *putting on* likely reflects the baptismal ritual in Pauline churches (TBC). Here it is dependent on the imagery and thought pattern found in Colossians 3:9–10, where it is part of a larger context of having died and risen with Christ (Col. 2:20; 3:1; note also the baptismal formula in Col. 3:11; cf. Gal. 3:27–28; Best, 1998:431–3, doubts the connection with Col.). Dependency on Colossians is by no means simple copying, however, as the following chart illustrates (e.g., see how the terms for *new*, *kainos* and *neos*, *can be interchanged*):

Ephesians 4:22–24

Colossians 3:9–10

put off (*apotithēmi*)

take off (*apekduomai*)

the old human (*anthrōpos*)

the old human (*anthōpos*)

renewed (*ananeoomai*)

renewed (*anakainoomai*)

in the spirit of your minds

in knowledge

put on the new human

put on the new [human]

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

(*kainos* anthrōpos)

(*neos* [anthrōpos])

created according to (*kata*)

according to (*kata*)

God

the image of its creator

Together these texts are witness to the importance of baptism in Pauline churches and to the creativity with which exhortation could appeal to baptism.

The basis of exhortation is that believers have left behind an old life and taken up a new one (the first and third infinitives are in the past tense), expressed in terms of *taking off the old human* (*anthrōpos*) and *putting on the new human* (*anthrōpos*). Does this refer to the individual's nature or orientation? Or is something larger at stake? Romans 6:6 speaks of *our old anthrōpos* being crucified with Christ, which lends a somewhat individualistic understanding to *anthrōpos* ("self," NIV, NRSV; cf. 2 Cor. 4:16, referring to the "outer" and the "inner *anthrōpos*"; Shillington: 105–7). Most versions cast this phrase in Ephesians 4:24 individualistically as *self* (NRSV, NIV, NASB, TEV) or psychologically as *human nature* (REB).

However, chapter 2 already introduced *kainos anthrōpos* as referring to hostile and fractious humanity reconstituted in Christ as *the new human* (2:15, notes). The NJB recognizes this by making a distinction, translating *old anthrōpos* as the *old self* and the *new anthrōpos* as the *New Man* [*sic*], indicating an awareness of the connection to 2:15 and also to 4:13 (*the perfect Man*). There is no reason, however, to conceive of the *old anthrōpos* as any less comprehensive than the *new*.

At the core of this imagery is the fundamental issue of what it means to be human. In Ephesians, this is definitely *not* understood individualistically. Human identity is understood both negatively and positively to be shaped by corporate experience (cf. 2:1–3, 15–16; 4:1–16, 17–19). People either participate in "the first Adam," to put it in language not used here but which informs the author's "anthropology," or they participate through Christ's peace in the "new Adam" (cf. esp. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49). To speak of *the old human* and *the new human* is a way of describing a "culture of humanness" more than any one individual's character (so also Martin, 1993:152, on Col. 3:9–10).

The *old* way of being human is marked by decay, by the rot that sets in through deceitful desire (cf. 4:17–19; 2:1–3). This is "life" lived in a pact with death (cf. Prov. 8:36; Isa. 28:15, 18; Wisd. of Sol. 1:16–2:24). It is the "life" readers of this letter *once* lived. The presence of this urgent exhortation shows that they *still* struggle not to live it. After all, their *new* life takes place in the midst of and alongside sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2). Believers in Christ are "in the world but not of it," as John 17 says, and for that reason are in a constant struggle to define themselves over against the world (5:3–21). Such a struggle takes place in each individual, to be sure. However, both *old human* and *new human* point to an intricately interconnected social and cultural existence in which values and imagination are forged on an anvil much larger than the individual human mind or heart.

In contrast to *the old human*, *the new human* is Christ. Christ is the *head* attached to a *body* (4:15) made up of many individual members (4:7, 16). Christ is *the new human* (2:15) *created according to God* (4:24; 2:10). This is a new "self," but a self large enough to encompass the whole church and more—the same *new anthrōpos* (*human*) in (to) whom all things are being gathered (1:10; contra Best, 1998:439–40, who individualizes the *new anthrōpos* radically throughout Ephesians). The identity of individual believers is defined by the whole—Christ. So the struggle to live as *the new human* in a world in which the *old human* is still much "alive" is not one engaged in alone but *together* with other members of the body of Christ. *Putting on the new human* (4:24) is another way of referring to becoming one with the body of Christ and together with others growing into Christ (4:15–16).

The use of the past tense in the first and third infinitives (*to have taken off* in 4:22, and *to have put on* in 4:24) can leave the impression of a past momentary experience of conversion and/or baptism. In these verses, however, the radically transformative imagery of baptism is linked with the motif of *hearing*, *teaching*, and *learning* (4:20–21). This implies a *moment* of transformation and also a *process* of formation.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

While initiated and undergirded by grace (cf. 2:5, 8), life in *the new human* requires all the energy, discipline, and effort believers can muster, individually and together (4:11–16).

In keeping with this insight, the second infinitive *to be renewed* (passive) or *to renew [yourselves]* (middle, acting on oneself) is in the present tense, implying ongoing present experience. Recall the similar Romans 12:2: “Be transformed by the renewing of [your] mind.” Surprisingly, such a “passive” experience as the renewal of the mind is stated in Romans 12 as an *imperative*. Here the reminder about *having been taught* (past tense, 4:21) *to be renewed* (present tense! 4:23) carries an implicit imperative. Renewal of *the spirit of the mind* is an ongoing process related to *hearing, teaching, and learning Christ*.

The phrase *the spirit of your* (pl.) *mind* is as puzzling as it is unique. Notice the variety of translations. NRSV translates fairly literally *in the spirit of your minds*. Others are more interpretive: *in the attitude of your minds* (NIV); *acquire a fresh, spiritual way of thinking* (NAB); *your mind renewed in spirit* (NJB); *in mind and spirit* (REB); *hearts and minds* (TEV). Interpreters typically take one of two paths. One is to take *spirit* as more or less synonymous with “mind,” “heart,” or “inner person” (cf. 4:18; 3:16–17, but see notes; cf., e.g., Barth, 1974:508–9; Best, 1998:436; Lincoln: 287). The other takes *spirit* to refer to the divine Spirit, whatever the grammatical difficulties (e.g., Houlden: 319; Schnackenburg: 200).

Gordon Fee has taken into account both interpretations. In his view, early readers would have taken *spirit* to refer first to the “human spirit,” as we should. But they and we should “be prepared also to recognize the Holy Spirit as hovering nearby,” the agent and power of renewal (Fee, 1987:712). As stated repeatedly in this commentary, where grammatical ambiguity invites equally important and illuminating readings consistent with the gist of the letter as a whole, one should resist resolving the ambiguity.

Verse 24 draws attention specifically to the creation of *the new human* (cf. 2:10, 15). *The new human* has been created *according to God* (*kata theon*) *in* (or *with* [*in*]) *righteousness* (or *justice, uprightness* [NJB]), *and in* (or *with*) *holiness of the truth*. NRSV and many other versions correctly understand the phrase *according to God* as referring to the image of God: *according to the image of the one who created him* (cf. Gen. 1:26; not as obvious as in Col. 3:10). Believers put on *the new human*—Christ—and thus become *like God* (cf. 5:1!); they become part of the *new human* who has been *created in justice and holiness of the truth*.

Translations vary greatly in how they render this last phrase. Along with the NIV and NRSV, most take *the truth* adjectivally (e.g., *true righteousness*). There is every reason, however, to allow *the truth* a higher profile, as the following contrast in verse 25 regarding *the lie* will show. *The truth* is characterized by both *righteousness* or *justice* (both equally well translate the Greek *dikaiousunē*) and *holiness*. This is a familiar pairing. God, for example, is characterized by *justice* and *holiness* (Deut. 32:4, LXX; Ps. 145:17 [144:17, LXX]; cf. also Luke 1:75; Wisd. of Sol. 9:3).

Truth and *God* are inextricably linked as well, as are *doing* or *speaking the truth in love* and *growing into Christ* in 4:15. *Truth* is thus intended to encompass reality as shaped and re-created by God in Christ. *Truth* is a rubric for life as the *new human*. Should we be surprised to find it as the first item of the armor of God in 6:14? To speak of *righteousness* and *holiness* as “virtues” (Lincoln: 288) is not wrong, but it does undervalue their roles as divine gifts and as modes of participation in the *new human*.

No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth 4:25–32

4:25 Saying No to the Lie and Speaking Truth

Putting off the lie in verse 25 echoes *putting off the old human* in verse 22. Several translations (e.g., NIV, NJB, REB) take the aorist participle as an imperative, as is grammatically possible. However, the aorist participle can also serve, as I have translated, to express the basis for the subsequent appeal: *Since you have put off the lie,* where *the lie* is the equivalent to *the old human*.

As in the case of *the truth* in verse 24, translators typically underplay the significance of *the lie*. No doubt under impact of the subsequent command *to speak truth with the neighbor*, they see in this little more than a prohibition against lying, the first in a series of prohibitions running to the end of verse 31 (cf. Col. 3:8–9). However, the use of the noun *the lie* and the strong echo of *to put off* or *take off* in 4:22, suggest that in Ephesians *the lie* stands for much more than making statements that are not true. This parallels *the truth* in verse 24 being much more than a matter of words that are trustworthy (notes on 4:15, 21; and 6:14).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The lie represents nothing less than *the old human* in rebellion against God (cf. Rom. 1:25; so also Barth, 1974:511; contra Best, 1998:445; Lincoln: 300).

Deception of self and of others is often used in the Bible to describe a society in rebellion against God. Zechariah, from where the injunction to *speak truth with the neighbor* is taken (Zech. 8:16; cf. Lev. 19:17–18), identifies love of “false oaths” as a fundamental characteristic of rebellion against God (see esp. Zech. 8:17; cf. also Lev. 19:11, 15–16). Isaiah 59, which underlies 6:14–17, also makes the absence of truth the hallmark of an unjust society ripe for judgment (esp. Isa. 59:3–4, 13–15). *The lie* is thus not simply “telling a lie”; it is shorthand for the life of the *old human*. *The lie* refers to callous disregard for truth in relationships, inside and outside the church, in both private and public spheres. But it refers just as well to the fundamental misreading of reality by those who mistake slavery for freedom, and such “freedom” for impunity (cf. 2:1–3; 4:17–19; 5:3–5).

In verse 14 the author has warned about no longer living as infants vulnerable to the deceits and wiles of those who would lead them astray. Now 4:25–32 treats old and new ways of walking, the old human and the new human, and the truth and the lie as an essential part of exhortation. And the exhortation is directed to those who already have (past tense!) *put on the new human*—Christ.

This tells us that, despite all the reminders of what was *once* the case and assurances of what is *now* true, the “culture” of the old way of being human remains the context in which the *new human* learns to exercise *justice* and *holy truth*. However much believers are *holy ones already in the heavenlies with Christ* (2:5–6), their identification with Christ is lived out in immediate proximity to *the lie*. Light shines in and into the darkness (5:8–14; cf. John 1:5), even when found in the lives of believers.

The reference to *speaking the truth with the neighbor* (4:25) must then also mean more than simply “telling the truth to the neighbor.” It is surely shorthand for living the life of *the new human* (cf. 4:24). The words are virtually identical with Zechariah 8:16. But since there is no quotation formula that introduces the phrase, we cannot be absolutely sure the author is specifically quoting Scripture. He may have simply drawn it from Jewish ethical tradition (so Best, 1998:446; Lincoln: 300; cf., e.g., Test. Dan 5:1–2). However, since Ephesians frequently cites the OT, and since Zechariah 8 resonates with the concerns in Ephesians, it is likely that the author is consciously quoting Zechariah.

There is, however, one small difference between Ephesians 4:25 and Zechariah 8:6, LXX. Zechariah has “to (*pros*)” rather than *with (meta) the neighbor*, as in Ephesians. Speaking “to” the neighbor is of course to be speaking “with” or “in the presence of” the neighbor. But the nuance is somewhat different. *Speaking truth* is what believers do together, *each with his neighbor, since we are members of each other*. This can imply the sometimes hard words of loving confrontation (see Eph. 4:26!), but it can also suggest the truth members of the body speak together—to each other and to the world, including to the powers (3:10; 6:14).

Notice, incidentally, that in Zechariah 8, *truth* and *peace* are practiced before an audience of Gentiles who through this witness have their interest in God awakened (8:18–23). So also in Ephesians the good news of peace goes out to the *near* and the *far* (see esp. 2:13, 17). Hence, though *neighbor* should be taken first to refer to a fellow member of the body of Christ (so also Lincoln: 300; Schnackenburg: 206), nothing precludes the term from having much wider resonance (so also Best, 1998:447). A truthful corporate life is an inherently evangelistic enterprise.

Several exhortations now illustrate what it means to say “No to the Lie and Yes to the Truth.” They are not simply prohibitions, however. They are accompanied by a positive alternative to the old way of being human. The prohibitions are in some ways no more than a foil for the real point of the exhortation, to encourage participation in the life of *the new human*.

4:26–27 Sinless Anger

At first glance, the prohibition not to sin in relation to anger seems to be mostly negative: readers are *not* to sin, *not* to let the sun go down on their anger, and *not* to give room for the devil. When read this way, these verses anticipate the prohibition of anger or wrath in 4:31 (cf. Col. 3:8; James 1:19–20). Nursed or unresolved anger appears to be the central concern. To paraphrase: *Deal with your anger before the sun sets, or the devil will get a foothold in your life!* This is, however, not the only or even the best understanding of the text.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The prohibition not to sin in relation to anger is taken verbatim from the Greek translation (LXX) of Psalm 4:4. In the Hebrew, the Psalm text is a warning against sinning when angry, and that is how translators render the Psalm text (NIV: *In your anger do not sin*; NRSV: *When you are disturbed [or angry], do not sin*.) In short, deal with your anger before it becomes sin! The Greek, however, has an imperative: *Be angry, but do not sin!* Ephesians evidently employs the Greek version of the Psalm.

One way of explaining this strange text is to understand the imperative as a “concessive” imperative, and thus not really an imperative at all: *Be angry [if you must], but do not sin* (so NIV, NAB, NJB; Barth, 1974:513; Best, 1998:449; Lincoln: 301; Schnackenburg, 207). In this case there is no real difference between the Greek and the Hebrew text of Psalm 4:4. The following clause *Do not let the sun set on your anger* only reinforces the urgency of dealing quickly with anger. In this interpretation it is *anger* that is the problem (cf. 4:31!). And it is sin not to get anger out of the way by sundown. Such anger is an open door through which the devil will find entry.

An alternative interpretation emerges, however, when careful attention is given to the vocabulary of the second sentence in verse 26, in particular the term usually translated as *anger*—*parorgismos*—which appears only here in noun form in the NT, but several times in the Greek OT. It is best translated as “provocation to anger” rather than “anger” (this is even the case in Jer. 21:5, where it can very well denote God’s furious baiting of Zedekiah; contra Lincoln: 302). That is also its meaning when it appears in verb form in Ephesians 6:4: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger!*

If *parorgismos* is translated in 4:26 as “that which provokes to anger,” then the focus shifts from anger to that which provokes it. The problem is “out there,” an objective offense that requires a response, and not the emotional response to that offense. The devil gains a foothold less through anger than through leaving the provocation to anger in place past sundown.

Whose anger is being provoked? On one hand, the command to be angry in verse 26 suggests that it is the readers who are to deal with what has provoked *them* to anger. Without attributing any inherent value to anger, there are things that will and *should* anger those whose view of life is shaped by *the new human*, the indwelling Christ. Injustice and falsehood are provocations to those who have been created for *justice* and *truth* (4:24). More importantly, however, such violations of God’s will provoke *God’s* anger or wrath. *God’s* judgment urges dealing with such matters before sundown.

That understanding of God’s will and wrath raises questions: Is it the neighbor’s provocation of yourself and/or of God that must be pointed out and dealt with? Or is it your own provocations to anger that must be confessed and corrected? (cf. Eccles./Sirach 5:4–7!). In either case, these provocations should be dealt with *immediately*.

Ephesians 4:25–26 should be seen as part of a tradition running from Leviticus 19 to Qumran and to Matthew 18 (so also Gnilya: 235–6; TBC). It sees sin as provocation to anger, most importantly, God’s wrath. It also draws the implications of Leviticus 19:17 for life in the communal *new human*. In the process, one of the most central concerns of the law—the love of neighbor—has moved to the center of the elaboration of life in the *new human* (2:11–22, notes on the ongoing relevance of the law).

The command in 4:27, *Do not give room to the devil*, is thus more than a call to avoid giving the devil an opening. Speaking *the truth with the neighbor* and dealing with *provocations to wrath* before the sun sets reflect the courageous if sometimes conflictual intervention of love. Just so, *not giving room to the devil* is a matter of courageously opposing the devil. Indeed, this little phrase anticipates the full picture in 6:10–20 of the armed body of Christ confronting *the devil* and his minions with truth, justice, peace, faith, and salvation. The way the devil is denied space is through the courageous and sometimes angry speaking of truth in love whenever there are provocations to divine wrath. We catch a glimpse here of the conflictual dimensions of the gathering in of all things.

4:28–29 Meeting Need with Hands and Words

On the surface the commands against *stealing* and *foul language* appear ill suited to serve as paradigmatic or representative exhortations for life as *the new human*. One might, of course, see *stealing* as representing selfishness and greed (cf. 5:3, 5). Likewise, rather than simply “speaking garbage” (Fee, 1987:712), *foul language* might be viewed as communication alienated from *the truth*. It emerges from the mouth of the *old human* (cf. 5:4, 6; cf. also James 3:1–12; 1QS 7.2–11).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The real weight in these two exhortations falls not on stealing and rotten speech, however, but on the alternative. *The new human* does not steal, but *works the good with the hands*. Such labor is not for self, which can itself be a form of stealing within God's economy. It is performed *in order to have something to share with the one who has need*. Members of *the new human* do not speak *rotten* words, but *good* words, again, not for the sake of personal purity, but *for the building up of that which is lacking, so that [the words] might give grace to those who hear*. The references to stealing and trash talking are thus little more than foils (contrasts) to bring out the real emphasis in these exhortations—living for the well-being of others.

Here we encounter up close the *good works* prepared by God for those who have been *saved by grace* (2:8–10): laboring to meet the needs of others, building up those in need, and dispensing grace to those with ears to hear. Although the injunctions are general and find echoes in many other biblical and nonbiblical texts, they are powerful. Indeed, the specific wording may hint at the imitation of Paul, who says that he “worked hard with his own hands” (1 Cor. 4:12; cf. 9:6).

Speaking words that bring grace to those who hear is also evocative of the prime task of the apostle: to bring words of healing, grace, and salvation to those who hear (e.g., 3:7–10; 6:19–20; cf. Rom. 10:5–17; 2 Cor. 5:20–6:13). In short, an apostolic mission awaits those who turn their back on the old ways of being human.

4:30 On Not Grieving the Holy Spirit

Verse 30 is a clear and unambiguous warning not to *grieve the Holy Spirit of God*. That exhortation can stand on its own, and it is often read that way. Pauline writing often groups exhortations that do not have any relationship to each other. That does not take away from their importance. It only means that there is no clear progression of thought or logic.

Nevertheless, there is ample reason to interpret this warning in the larger context of life as *the new human*. For one, the exhortation touches on the power that undergirds living as *the new human*. Second, the emphasis on speech in both the preceding and immediately following verses reflect the close relationship between *Spirit* and speech elsewhere in this letter (5:18–19; 6:17; cf. e.g., Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 5:18–19).

At the basis of this exhortation lies the awareness that God's empowerment through the *Spirit* is vulnerable to callous disregard in both deed and word—this despite the reminder that it is the *Spirit* by which believers have been *sealed for the day of redemption*. *Sealing* may refer to the experience of baptism (e.g., Perkins: 110; Russell: 83–5; Schnackenburg: 210; contra Barth, 1974:521; Lincoln: 40; Best, 1998:458, believes the sealing relates equally to baptism and prior conversion). This would imply, on the surface, that the status of believers on that *day of redemption* is assured: they *were sealed* (cf. 1:13). But the warning here not to grieve that Spirit is intended to dispel any glib sense of security. Indeed, the exhortation may be heard as a warning of dire consequences for grieving the Spirit of God. Callousness can impede the power of God to transform.

It will be understood as such an obstruction especially by those familiar with the words of Jesus in Mark 3:29: “Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin” (cf. Matt. 12:32). The context of that warning is clearly different from Ephesians. In Mark 3, Jesus responds to the accusation that he is empowered by an unclean spirit. In Ephesians, the concern is the betrayal in word and deed of the empowering and re-creating presence of God (cf. 3:18).

The consequence of such betrayal is to subvert and undo the work of the Spirit. The Spirit brings unity to the body of Christ (4:3), assures access to the presence of God for those who have been reconciled through the peacemaking Christ (2:18), makes them into a fit dwelling for God (2:22), enlivens their worship (5:18–19), and provides them with the needed armaments for struggling with the principalities and powers (6:17–18). So, even though the context is different, the heavy weight of Mark 3 is felt with reason.

The gravity of the exhortation is heightened by the fact that the wording echoes Isaiah 63:10, LXX, where the prophet decries Israel's rebellion as *grieving* [God's] *Holy Spirit* (Fee, 1987:713, n. 175; Lincoln: 306). In response, God becomes Israel's enemy (Isa. 63:1–6). Evoking that important prophetic warning is quite intentional.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The logic is straightforward: You have been liberated from the sway of the evil spirit now at work among the sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2). You have been brought to life, empowered by the Spirit of God (3:18), brought into unity with Christ by the Spirit (4:3), brought near to God by the Spirit (2:18, 22), and sealed for the great day of redemption by the Spirit (cf. 1:13). You insult God if you return to the old ways of being human, or do not avail yourselves of the spirited power of God for life in *the new human*. Such sinning is *grievous* because it happens in the presence of God, in full view of God's enabling grace—"murder in the cathedral."

The presence of this exhortation is a sobering reminder that life in *the new human* this side of the *day of redemption* is fraught with vulnerability, danger, and struggle for faithfulness. It is a life that believers begin with the promise of God's enabling nearness in the Spirit, but also against the backdrop of God's judgment. It is a life marked by countless daily choices that either draw on the power of the Spirit or give room for the devil to wreak havoc.

4:31–32 *Contrasting Ways of Relating to Others*

"Exhortation by catalogue" (Barth, 1974:550) was a common tradition of moral education in Jewish and Christian circles. The use of lists of vices and virtues was typical of what is often referred to as "the doctrine of the two ways." It provided a handy way of contrasting faithfulness and rebellion. We find this well-known motif in the Sermon on the Mount: "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matt. 7:13–14; in Pauline writings, see also, e.g., Rom. 1:29–31; 1 Cor. 5:9–11; Gal. 5:16–26; beyond the NT, cf. Ps. 1; Prov. 2:12–13; esp. Ep. Barnabas; Lincoln: 296–7, with texts and literature).

In this case the author is highly dependent on Colossians 3:8 and 12. As in Colossians, the list of vices comes first, immediately following the warning about not grieving the Holy Spirit. Again the matter of *anger*, already identified in Ephesians 4:26, emerges as a major concern. In verse 26 *anger*, or not dealing with the *provocation to anger*, had the potential of giving a foothold for the devil. In 4:31 anger in its various guises constitutes the sure way to grieve the Holy Spirit, to frustrate and undermine the work of God. Thus believers are, literally, to *remove* or *get rid of* (GNB, NIV, NAB) all forms of anger from their midst (Col. 3:8 uses the term *putting/taking off*, familiar from Eph. 4:22, 25).

Verse 31 is a virtual catalog of anger: *bitterness, rage, wrath, angry yelling, slander, and every (other) evil*. Evidently at least some terms are synonymous. At the same time, we can observe a certain progression in a "cycle of anger" (so also Best, 1998:460–2). Anger emerges out of a disposition of bitterness and resentment; it bursts forth in fits of rage, but is also nursed as persistent hostility; it is abusive and destructive of others, knowing no limit in its destructive potential (*every kind of evil*).

We entertained the possibility that the imperative in 4:26, *Be angry but do not sin!* reflects a context in which there are provocations to anger that need to be dealt with, where anger is *not* the opposite to the love of the neighbor (4:26, notes). What is being criticized in 4:31 is anger that grows out of the *absence* of love (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 13:5), anger that is *not* a result of witnessing the breaking of covenant and community, but is out to destroy relationships.

Just as in the case of *stealing* and *rotten speech*, an alternative is held out to those who have chosen to walk the way of *the new human*, again by means of a catalog: *Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other just as God in Christ forgave you (us)* (5:32). Over against bitterness and anger are placed *kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (or graciousness)*. The focus is less on actions than on the disposition out of which actions emerge. It is a matter of character. Importantly, the character of *the new human* who has been created in God's own image (4:24) is patterned after the divine creator.

Though the terms together describe a positive and generous disposition to fellow members of the community of faith, each term retains important dimensions of meaning. Kindness translates *chrēstos*, a common term for a good person (Best, 1998:462). Significantly, it often appears in the Greek Bible in expressions of praise to God, frequently translating the Hebrew *tob* ("good," as in Pss. 25:8; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 136:1; cf. also Wisd. of Sol. 15:1–3). To say that the Lord is good is to describe God in his kindness toward humanity. In the context of relationship, "good" becomes kind, generous, and gracious (cf. esp. 2:7!

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

also Rom. 11:22; Titus 3:4; 1 Pet. 2:3)—even to enemies! (Luke 6:35). It is this kindness that is to characterize humanity made in the image of God.

Compassionate translates *eusplanchnos* (lit., “good intestines,” cf. “gut feeling”), which appears in the NT only here and in 1 Peter 3:8, and not at all in the Greek OT. A very telling if rare use of the term appears in the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh 7 (Ode 12:7, LXX), where the arch-sinner, King Manasseh, appeals to God for mercy, describing him as *Most High, of great compassion (eusplanchnos), long-suffering, and very merciful*. *Tenderhearted* gets closer anatomically to the literal meaning of *eusplanchnos* than does *compassionate*. But since the guts were understood to be the seat of feeling, the term refers literally to a “gut feeling” for others.

In his blessing of God for the birth of a son, Zechariah refers to God’s “bowels of mercy” (*splanchna eleous*, Luke 1:78). God’s saving intervention in the affairs of humanity emerges out of deep feelings for humanity. It is this kind of love for others that is to define the character of those who are on the way to becoming more fully *the new human* created in God’s image.

Forgiving translates *charizomenos*, which can mean “to grant favor” in the sense of “to grace” or “to be gracious,” but can also mean *to forgive*, the translation of choice in most Bibles. While that may be the best reading, it is important to note that *charizomenos* is a verbal (participial) form of the meaning-laden *charis* (*grace* or *gift*) encountered frequently in Ephesians (e.g., 1:2, 6, 7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7). One should therefore think of forgiveness first as practicing grace in imitation of God. Notably, in 2:7 the limitless wealth of God’s *grace (charis)* comes to expression in God’s *kindness (chrēstotēs)*, a cognate of *chrēstos*.

¹ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). [Ephesians](#) (pp. 169–226). Herald Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Imitating God and Walking Like Christ 5:1–2

The first two verses of chapter 5 bring this section to a climactic conclusion. Ephesians 4:17 exhorted the readers *no longer to walk as the Gentiles*; now 5:1–2 exhorts them *to imitate God and walk in love, just as Christ loved them*.

The close connection to what immediately precedes these two verses is shown first in the repetition of the emphatic *Be, therefore ...* (cf. 4:32). And just as 4:32 grounds the positive disposition of graciousness in God's own grace, so now readers are exhorted to *be imitators of God*. The specific command to *imitate God* is unique in the Bible and relatively rare in Judaism generally (extensive discussion in Barth, 1974:556, n. 10; 588–92; Best, 1998:466–8; Lincoln: 311). Its rarity is no doubt related to the deference shown to God in Judaism. Recall that the sin of the first humans was to want to be “like God” (Gen. 3:5).

Such deference notwithstanding, the implicit call to imitation of God is there already in the Holiness Code of Leviticus 19:2: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” This finds a striking echo in the Sermon on the Mount: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). The parallel “Be merciful” in Luke 6:36 comes close to Ephesians. That familial connection is evident also in our text. Readers are to imitate God *as beloved children* (cf. Matt. 5:45).

In Paul's letters, *imitation* is an important concept. Usually it is a matter of imitating Paul and his associates (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9), and thereby Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6); but Paul can also speak of believers imitating other congregations (1 Thess. 2:14). Also for Paul, the familial dimension of parent-child marks much of this tradition of moral formation as imitation (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14–16; Best, 1998:467; Perkins: 114).

Only in our present text do we find the call to imitate God directly. This reflects the thoroughly theocentric perspective of Ephesians. But it also reflects the exalted view of the church as sons and daughters, *beloved children* created in the divine parent's image. Here the parent of these beloved children is depicted as a model of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. The imitation of God is breathtaking in 6:10–20, where the new human receives God's own armor for the task of combating the principalities and powers.

This is not to say, however, that believers are to imitate God in all the ways in which God is active in the affairs of humanity. There are hints at believers' participation in divine judgment in the command to be angry in 4:26, in the summons to expose the works of darkness in 5:11, and in the call to enter into battle with the forces of evil (6:10–20). Yet *grace* and *love* rather than judgment (e.g., 5:5) are the principal areas of imitation.

Nowhere does God's love and grace come to greater expression than in verse 2 in the self-offering of God's Son, the Christ. The nature of Christ's love is described in cultic terminology: *He handed himself over for us as an offering and sacrifice to God, as a pleasing odor*. In contrast to the Gentiles who *handed themselves over to licentiousness, impurity, and greed* (4:19), Christ *handed himself over for us as an offering and a sacrifice*. Just as Christ offered up his life as a pleasing sacrifice to God *for us*, so *we too* are to *walk in love*, to offer ourselves as a pleasing sacrifice for the sake of each other and God (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; Ezek. 20:41). God's *beloved children* are to *walk in love, just as Christ loved them*. *Just as* appears already in 4:32 and is sometimes called a “conformity pattern” (Lincoln: 309, 311).

Christ's walk was marked by love and boundless generosity, but it was a costly walk (2:16). The reference to *sacrifice* may echo Colossians 1:24: “I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (NRSV; cf. Rom. 8:17). Christ's death was *for us* (cf. Rom. 5); and it was *for us* also in the sense that it provides the model for what it means for us to love, to take up our own crosses, as Jesus puts it in the Gospels (Mark 8:34 and par.). Most immediately, however, the language of Ephesians 5:2 is drawn from the realm of worship, a reminder that the true and faithful *walk* is a grateful offering of a *living* sacrifice in imitation of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; on ethics and worship, see Eph. 3:20–21, notes; “Doxology,” TBC for 3:14–21; for more on imitation of Christ in the NT, see J. H. Yoder, 1994:112–33; Swartley, 2000:218–45).

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

As manifest throughout the analysis, there is much resonance in this passage with other parts of Ephesians as also with Pauline letters. These verses retrace the steps taken in 2:1–10, which begins with a description of life apart from God as *walking in trespasses*, obeying the evil ruler of the air, following the desires of the flesh (2:1–3; cf. 2:12). God’s merciful raising of these dead *sons and daughters of disobedience* (2:5–6) parallels the *taking off* of the decaying *old human* and the *putting on of the new human*—Christ (cf. 2:15). The purpose of being re-created in Christ into God’s image is *good works* (2:10). Our present text can rightly be viewed as an elaboration of what it means to practice “the good” (esp. 4:28–29).

In addition to recalling chapter 2, the author appears to draw on Colossians 3:5–15, with its baptismal imagery of “taking off the old human” (*anthrōpos*) and “putting on the new” (3:9–10). Notice also lists of vices (Col. 3:5, 8–9) and virtues (3:12–15), matched by several items appearing in Ephesians 4:17–5:2. Romans 1:18–25 likely also figures in the formation of this passage, as may Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 (see below).

Negative Stereotyping of Gentiles

The negative characterization of Gentile existence in Ephesians 4:17–19 owes much to a common tradition in Judaism that served to mark off the people of God and to reinforce that boundary (2:11–12, notes; discussion in Best, 1997:143–6, 152; 1998:416–25). Romans 1:18–32 (esp. vv. 21–25) provides a precedent in the Pauline letters for a characterization of Gentile life as vacuous and futile. Such character sketches are found in other roughly contemporaneous Jewish writings, most accessibly in Wisdom of Solomon 13–17.

The elements of such a benighted existence are a life of mindless and ruinous self-indulgence, accompanied and precipitated by a morally bankrupt and self-deluded consciousness. Practice and thought, body and mind, go hand in hand. Ignorance is thus more than simply lack of information (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14). It is chosen and therefore culpable ignorance (cf. Rom. 1:20–22), masquerading as knowledge and wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–25). In our text this tradition serves as reminder and warning more than it does as an accurate and balanced depiction of Gentile life. It was and remains a common device in moral exhortation (on Jewish and Gentile examples, see Best, 1998:423–5).

One danger in such stereotyping is the exaggeration of the *other’s* badness; just as dangerous is the exaggeration of one’s own goodness. The rest of the exhortation in the present passage is intended to dispel such blindness.

Taking Off and Putting on

At the root of the motif of *putting off* or *taking off* and *putting on* (4:22–24) lies the drama of the baptismal ritual (Meeks: 155; so also Lincoln: 284–5, despite his skepticism on how much we know about specific Pauline baptismal practice; Best, 1998:432–3 is even more dubious). While we have hard evidence only for later years, it is a safe guess that in Pauline churches those being baptized took off their old clothes to symbolize leaving the old way of being human (so also Jeschke: 126). They were then immersed as a symbol of their participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rom. 6). Emerging from the watery grave, they put on new clothes, symbolizing investment with a new identity as participants in the body of Christ, *the new human* created in the image of God (4:24).

Chapter 2 shows the same movement from a “living death” under the tutelage and dominion of the ruler of the air to life as a new human *created in Christ Jesus for good works* (2:1–10). And chapter 6, with its clarion call to *put on the armor of God*, will show with what militancy baptismal vows could be taken. Paul earlier speaks similarly in Romans 13:12 of “taking off the works of darkness” and “putting on the weapons of light,” synonymous, it turns out, with “putting on Christ” in 13:14.

Anger and Speaking Truth

In the notes, the interpretation of Ephesians 4:26–27 regarding provocations to anger—whether one’s own provocations of God or another’s provocation of oneself or of God—finds support in Leviticus 19:17. Members of the covenant community are to “reprove” or “expose” the sin of the neighbor lest it bring judgment on themselves as well (on exposing sin, see Eph. 5:11; cf. also Prov. 17:10; 27:5–6). *Speaking* such painful *truth* is nothing other than a deep if potentially conflictual expression of love for the neighbor, required (!) of members of the same covenant community. Leviticus 19:17 no doubt underlies the command

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

taken from Zechariah 8:16 and quoted in Ephesians 4:25, to *speak truth each with his neighbor*. In Zechariah 8:14, LXX, the sins of the fathers are referred to as *provoking [God] to wrath (parorgisai, “to be angry!”* Cf. the rare *parorgismos* in Eph. 4:26).

Such neighborly love is reflected also in the Community Rule of the Dead Sea covenanters at Qumran. That rule repeatedly appeals to Leviticus 19:17 as a warrant for members of the community to deal straightforwardly and quickly with the sins of others. This means handling provocations to anger or wrath—*one’s own and God’s*—by reproaching the erring fellow member of the community (e.g., 1QS 5.24–6.1; CD 20.4–6, 17–19; 4QDe [4Q270] 10.3.13; 4.11–12). To be sure, such reproof is not to be done in the spirit of vengeance but rather “in truth, in meekness, and in compassionate love for the man [*sic*]” (1QS 5.25; cf. CD 20.4, 17–18; cf. Eph. 4:15, 25, 32).

Responding to such provocations must not be delayed; they must be dealt with “before sunset” (CD 9.6; 1QS 5.26). In striking similarity to Ephesians 4:27, the covenanter pledges that he “will not retain Belial within [his] heart” (1QS 10.21). The urgency is rooted in the concern for the covenant partner in light of the wrath or vengeance of the divine judge. “I shall enclose him with a solid fence to maintain faithfulness and staunch judgment with the justice of God” (1QS 10.25).

That same urgency to deal with the sin of the brother or sister through truthful and loving confrontation finds expression in the familiar Rule of Christ in Matthew 18:15–20. The objective is twofold. First, it is an act of love, motivated by the desire to win back the brother or sister, and thus to reconcile with the erring sibling and to reconcile the sinner with the family of God (18:15). The second objective is intricately related: to reclaim the erring brother or sister in light of the otherwise inevitable judgment or wrath of God. Indeed, “binding and loosing” (Matt. 18:18) amounts to participation in both the mercy and the judgment of God (on Matt. 18 and related passages: J. H. Yoder, 1992:1–13; 1997; in relation to church discipline: Huebner, 1997; Schroeder, 1993).

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

This text has evident interest for a believers church tradition born from the conviction that faithfulness means taking the road less traveled, the *renewed* way of life (4:23–24; cf. 2:10, NRSV) instead of the *former way* (4:22). The stark contrast of the two ways of “walking” resonates strongly with the values of nonconformity and separation from the world (4:17; 5:2; see also 5:3–21).

Baptism as Ritual of Transformation and Re-Creation

The central image of “taking off” and “putting on,” rooted in the drama of baptism, represents a major point of contact with Anabaptist and believers church traditions (4:22–25). This will be of special interest to churches that practice baptism by immersion. They witness an oft-repeated ritual of transformation, of clothes that need to be replaced after being drenched in the waters of baptism.

This text is a reminder that baptism is more than a membership rite, or even an act of obedience. It is the point of entry into the body of *the new human*—Christ, together with whom we have been raised to new life (2:5–6). As such, baptism marks the beginning of a new way of walking, a pledge of fidelity to participate in the life of *the new human* marked by justice, truth, and holiness (4:24; the Latin word *sacramentum*, from which comes the English term *sacrament*, referred to the military oath of Roman soldiers). Just as baptism represents a pledge of loyalty and faithfulness on the part of a believer, the new creation is *God’s* act of grace. (On baptism, TLC for 2:1–10; cf. Finger, 1989:342–8; J. H. Yoder, 1992:28–46, 71–3; McClendon, 1986:255–9, esp. relevant on relating baptism to “resurrection ethics.”)

Struggle *Inside* the Church with Old Ways of Walking

Our text can leave the impression that the problem with *the old human* (4:22) lies out there with *the Gentiles* (unbelievers, 4:17–19); truth, justice, and holiness prevail inside the church. Churches, including those that are heir to a tradition of radical commitment to holiness and separation from *the old human*, are deeply conscious and increasingly willing to admit openly that the old ways are still much in evidence in their homes and congregations. One need think only of the areas of consumerism, entertainment, and especially sexuality (TLC for 2:1–10). Two disparate responses to this reality vie with each other.

Realism Versus Perfectionism

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

One response is to become more “realistic” about the church. “Perfectionism” has thus been roundly criticized as arrogant and self-deluding (cf., e.g., Block; Sawatsky and Holland, 1993). A more pervasive example is the virtual disappearance of church discipline in many churches of the (once) radical stream (see, e.g., Resources Commission: 97–103; Huebner, 1997).

In response, it is important to observe that in our text the exhortation to *walk* (conduct ourselves) like *the new human* is inseparable from the conviction that the church—made up of mostly reclaimed sons and daughters of disobedience (2:2–3)—is the *body of the new human*—Christ. The indicative (the church *is* the body of Christ) is the premise for the imperative (it therefore *ought* to walk like Christ). To paraphrase Galatians 5:25: “If you are the new human, walk like one!” (5:8–10, notes). The discomfort with perfectionism easily becomes an attack on that premise, re-creation in Christ. Grace becomes then absolution for persistent stumbling rather than empowerment to walk like Christ in imitation of God (cf. 2:1–10, notes). Thereby the messianic character of the church is fatally subverted, and the Spirit is grieved.

Zero Tolerance

Another response runs in the opposite direction, mostly in relation to a specific set of concerns. There is quite rightly growing alarm in the church about abuse—abuse of power, privilege, and of sex. In that context, a consensus has emerged in both church and society about the importance of naming the reality of abuse, establishing rigorous standards of behavior, and developing stringent disciplinary procedures for dealing with those who have violated others, especially in the area of sexual behavior (see, e.g., Heggen, 1993; Melissa A. Miller). In short, in the context of dealing with matters of abuse, the church is rightly rediscovering the importance of truth, justice, and holiness.

In some measure the church is beginning to live by the wisdom of Leviticus 19 and its offspring (TBC). Sadly, it is often the broader social consensus that has pulled the church kicking and screaming into dealing with these issues. “Gentiles” have been holding the feet of the “saints” to the fire. However ironic, the “world” is giving the church an opportunity to rediscover the hard work of “walking” like *the new human*.

Ironically, those who are critical of perfectionism and of the old church discipline are often wholeheartedly supportive of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, whether in homes or church institutions. Might churches, whether mainstream or radical, see in the broad social consensus around the importance of dealing with sexual abuse, an opening to recover truth, justice, and holiness in relation also to *other* dimensions of life? These include relational, economic, political, and institutional dimensions. Churches might thereby recover what discipline could look like in a community committed to being the *new human* in an old world.

Anger: Virtue or Vice?

Our text suggests that anger is an inevitable and even mandatory response to injustice and violence, both inside and outside the church (4:26). Such anger is the experience of pain and the expression of outrage at the experience of violation or at witnessing it happen to others. In the same breath, our text warns us not to nurse anger into bitterness and vengeance (4:31). Instead, anger is to give way to loving if forceful speaking of truth to the neighbor (Augsburger on “care-fronting”) so as to bring about confession and transformation, and finally lead to forgiveness.

Anger, truth, love, and forgiveness are a volatile mix in relation to the abuse of power and sex within the church. Presently the issue of abuse is getting a lot of attention in North American churches. In the struggle for wholeness and healing, we are learning not to discount anger and not to coerce forgiveness. We are learning to work in a context of truth and to search for justice and holiness. Ephesians is wholly supportive of such a search. But, as stated above, it encourages us to expand that learning to other dimensions of life in the community of the new human. There are places on the globe where members of Christ’s body identify economic and political oppression and violence as primary arenas in which truth, justice, anger, and love are to be exercised. In such places it may be that the hunger for justice needs to be expanded into the more private arenas of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

The stress in Ephesians falls fundamentally on what makes for wholeness in the body, what builds up, what meets needs, and what communicates grace (4:28–29). Nothing quite succeeds at this like the imitation of a merciful, kind, and compassionate divine parent (4:32–5:2). It is of critical importance for churches in the “meekness” stream of tradition (TLC for 4:1–16) that such kindness, compassion, and

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

forgiveness must never be severed from justice, truth, and holiness—the hallmarks of the *new humanity*. If they are severed, they leave the provocations to anger in place and expose brothers and sisters to abuse and their abusers to the judgment of God.

11

4:1–16 Paul extensively presented the doctrinal basis of the Christian life (Eph. 1–3). He then gave practical applications of these doctrines (Eph. 4–6), with emphasis on a believer’s “walk” or lifestyle.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS: A QUALITY PRECIOUS TO GOD

Those who walk in the Spirit possess a quality of gentleness that is one of the hallmarks necessary for Christian unity. Paul challenges believers to a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus that is characterized by lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, mutual forbearance, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3).

“Gentleness” or “meekness” (Gk. *praut s*) refers to a humble, submissive attitude that is the opposite of pride. Not to be confused with weakness, gentleness is strength that is submitted to God and channeled into service to others. The Old Testament characterizes God as gentle (2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35). The New Testament describes Jesus as “gentle and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Believers, like their Lord, should pursue gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11) and wear it like a garment (Col. 3:12).

The godly virtue of gentleness, which is a quality of the heart, is counted as being more influential than outward beauty in winning an unbelieving husband to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1–4). A gentle spirit is precious to God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit necessary for godliness (holy, Christlike living), goodness (kindness toward others), and giftedness (service in the name of Jesus).

See also notes on Encouragement (Eph. 4); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Humility (Phil. 2); Submission (1 Pet. 3); Wives (Prov. 31)

4:12–16 These gifted individuals seek to equip other believers to do the work of the ministry by leading them into doctrinal and practical stability. This mutual edification (v. 12) will continue until the church reaches maturity and unity (v. 13). The mature church will no longer be led astray doctrinally (v. 14) and will exhibit the character qualities of Christ by mutually edifying itself (vv. 15, 16).

4:17–19 The Ephesians were admonished to avoid the lifestyle typical of unbelieving Gentiles all around them. This lifestyle was characterized by “futility,” being empty and without purpose. The understanding of unbelievers had been darkened because they had chosen not to receive God’s revelation (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4); they were “alienated” or separated from the life of God and so were unable to hear His voice; they were willfully ignorant of God and His truth (see 2 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:4); and their hearts had become blinded and calloused so that they were insensitive to God and had no fear of the consequences of their actions (see John 12:37–40). They had given themselves over to self-indulgent immorality characterized by an insatiable desire for more.

4:22–24 Unlike the unbelievers described, the Ephesians had learned life-changing new truth in Christ: Believers are to put off “the old man,” a phrase referring to the sinful lifestyle driven by desires that deceptively promised joy but did not give it; they are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew their thought patterns, changing them from impurity to holiness (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8); they are to put on “the new man,” a phrase referring to a new lifestyle of holiness and righteous living. This new lifestyle is put on positionally when a person receives Christ and needs to be lived out experientially through the Spirit’s empowering (Col. 3:9, 10).

4:26, 27 God has a plan for dealing with anger (see Ps. 13, Healing; Eccl. 7, Anger; chart, How Can You Prevent Inappropriate Anger).

ENCOURAGEMENT: A GIFT FOR YOUR HEARER

¹¹ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 169–226). Herald Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Paul's words admonish us to speak only good, not corrupt, words—ones that build up, encourage, and edify. Our words are to constitute a gift to the hearer (Eph. 4:29).

Jesus and Paul are examples for us in their use of uplifting words to encourage. Even when his ship started to sink, Paul gave words of encouragement (Acts 27:22). When Jesus' disciples were sinking, He spoke encouragement to them (Matt. 14:27). When Paul was being persecuted, the Lord appeared beside him and encouraged him (Acts 23:11).

Many people are bowed down under heavy emotional loads and are weary of life's struggles. How eager they are to hear a word of encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)! Often we turn the other way, but the Lord wants to give us kind words to say if we are willing to make ourselves available (Is. 50:4).

In Proverbs, the book of wisdom, much is written about the value of encouraging words (Prov. 16:24; 25:11). Not only do pleasant words taste sweet, but their use can lift us up to high places (Prov. 22:11). Whether we want to be encouragers because Jesus said "be of good cheer," because Paul urged us to "take heart," or because we are simply called to lift up the weary, edify the saints, and evangelize the lost—whatever our reason for wishing to bring sweetness to the soul, now is the time to start (James 4:17). See also Deut. 1:21, 29, 30; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 145:14; Mic. 2:7; Luke 22:32; Acts 13:15, note; Heb. 3:13; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Love (1 John 4); Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12)

4:30 Believers should not grieve the Holy Spirit through sins such as unwholesome speech (v. 29) and the outpouring of repressed anger (v. 31). Since only persons can be grieved, this verse affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

4:32 The basis for believers forgiving others is the fact that they themselves have been graciously forgiven by God (Gk. *charizomai*), and released from any *obligation* to make restitution (see Ps. 133, Healing).

GOD'S WILL: *CONFORMING TO HIS PURPOSE*

A mature Christian seeks God's will and asks for God's wisdom when she is facing a major decision. Believers must pray about decisions—especially life decisions such as "Where shall I go to college?" "Should I marry this man?" "Should I bring my ailing parent to live in my home?" Such decisions have serious consequences, and they deserve the prayerful seeking of God's perfect wisdom. But knowing God's will does not happen solely in prayer. It also requires a commitment to knowing His Word.

The Bible teaches that realizing (or proving) God's will is the result of habitually conforming your thinking and behavior to God's Word over a lifetime. As a Christian woman reads the Bible day by day, her mind is renewed with a new way of thinking about life. Worldly ideas, attitudes, and prejudices are replaced by thoughts that conform to God's ways. This process takes time, and there are no shortcuts. The transformation is never complete until death.

The Christian who has ongoing fellowship with the Lord through His Word comes to decisions equipped with a biblically informed way of thinking. Knowing God's will at major decision points is much easier if you are seeking God's will every day in Bible reading and prayer.

See also Dan. 2:23, note; Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:9; notes on Access to God (Rom. 10); Change Points in Life (Eccl. 3); Decision Making (1 Cor. 8)

CHILDREN: OBEDIENCE: *DO IT GOD'S WAY*

Children are to obey both their parents. This relationship exists "in the Lord," and the implication is that children and parents live under the authority of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:1). Children cannot be subject to their parents in a way that is contrary to the obedience they owe to Jesus Christ. They should obey their parents because this is "right" in God's eyes, as illustrated by the fourth Commandment (vv. 1, 2). A child's education would typically include the Ten Commandments; so Paul is drawing attention to truth children

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

would already know. The word “honor” includes the ideas of respect and esteem (v. 2). Life lived in submission to legitimate authority would benefit the child with a better and longer life (v. 3; see Deut 5:16). The term “father” can be used to represent both parents (see similar usage in Heb. 11:23). Unreasonable demands by parents will provoke children to anger and can push them to perpetual bitterness with the result that children lose hope of ever performing well enough to please (Col 3:21). Parents should instead rear their children in an atmosphere of nurturing: godly training in what is right, correction of what is wrong, and encouragement at every turn.

See also chart on The Ten Commandments Throughout Scripture; notes on Children (Ps. 128); Parenthood (Prov. 10)

5:18 The command to be filled applies to all believers. The passive voice of the verb indicates that this is not a manufactured experience; the Holy Spirit fills and controls them. Further, the present tense of the command indicates that there can be many, successive fillings. This filling is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the point of conversion.

5:19–21 As a result of the Spirit’s filling, believers will communicate with one another in an edifying manner. The Greek verb used includes all sorts of speech—singing of “psalms” (OT psalms), “hymns” (praises composed by Christians), and “spiritual songs” (spontaneous, Spirit-inspired praise). Second, they will sing praises to the Lord (see chart, Hymns and Songs Associated with Women). Third, they will continually give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Fourth, they will mutually submit to one another.

5:22–6:9 As Paul elaborated on the subject of submission, he showed what would happen in specific relationships within the family (see 1 Pet. 3, Submission; charts, Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission).

5:22–24 The exhortation specifies that wives are to submit themselves to their “own” husbands (v. 22). Paul in no way suggests that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they, as women, must submit to all other men. The wife’s submission is voluntary rather than forced (v. 22). God does not ask a wife to submit herself to her husband in violation of her Christian responsibility to walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. The marriage relationship is raised to lofty heights as Paul compared it to the relationship of Christ and His church (v. 23). The husband is not the Savior of the wife’s body. Nevertheless, the analogy holds that the husband is to be the protector of his wife (see Gen. 2:15–17, note). In voluntary submission, the wife can serve her husband, just as the church serves Christ, with freedom and dignity.

ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Original Relationship: Creation	Distortion of the Relationship: The Fall	Restoration of the Relationship: Redemption
Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).	The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).	Jesus Christ as Redeemer models both servant leadership for the man and selfless submission for the woman (Eph. 5:23–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

According to the egalitarian position, no difference existed between the man and the woman prior to the Fall. They were equal in personhood (as is also true in the complementarian position) and the same in role and function (while the complementarian position maintains a difference in role assignment for the man and for the woman).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

See also Gen. 1:26; 2:24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–24, 25–31, notes; notes on Headship (Gen. 1); The Creation of the Woman (Gen. 2); Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

5:25–31 Paul’s exhortation is equally clear to husbands: They are to love their wives (an admonition expressed six times in vv. 25–33) in the same manner in which Christ sacrificially loved the church (v. 25). Husbands must not be “bitter” or harsh with their wives (Col. 3:19). Christ’s love for His church is presently manifested in His work of atonement (Eph. 5:25) and sanctification (v. 26) so that He might in the end times present her as a pure and spotless bride (v. 27). Returning to the marriage relationship, Paul explained that the husband should love his wife as his own body because the two are actually one (v. 28; see Gen. 2:24). “Body” is used here, as elsewhere, to refer to the whole person (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 1:20). God prescribed that marriage provide a picture of the ultimate and eternal love between Christ and His church.

5:33 Paul summarized by reminding each husband to love his own wife sacrificially as himself and by reminding each wife to show respect to her husband as the God-ordained leader of the family “as to the Lord” (v. 22; see charts, Role Relationship Between Men and Women; Theological Foundation for Headship).

CAN THIS BE? EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT? ISN’T EQUAL JUST THAT? DOES THE WORD DIFFERENT SUGGEST...LEVELS?

COMPLEMENTARITY: *EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT*

Male and female were created as equal and complementary expressions of the image of God. Both bear His image fully, though in different ways. Their different roles in relationship to each other provide a picture of who God is and how He relates to His people.

Christ Jesus is equal with God the Father, yet submissive and responsive to Him (Phil. 2:6–8). God the Father loves the Son and exalts Him. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ provides loving, servant leadership; the church responds with respect and submission as Christ’s “Bride” (Eph. 5:22–33). Another counterpart to the picture is the relationship between church leaders and local bodies of believers (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sin has distorted the relationship between man and woman at every level, but believers are called to relate according to the Creator’s plan instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:15–25). This plan is marked by a holy reciprocity in which the husband’s loving headship awakens a responsive submission from the wife just as a wife’s submissive cooperation draws from her husband sensitive leadership. The realities of headship and submission are to be enacted within loving, equal, complementary male-female roles. In this, the image of God is properly reflected.

See also Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; charts on Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission; notes on Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

FATHERHOOD: *PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER*

The earliest concept of God for a child is greatly impacted by the relationship she has with her own father. Fathers in the Bible were the supreme authoritative figures in their families. With but a word they could determine the fate of their offspring. In contrast to this autocratic image of fatherhood, Paul’s advice to fathers emphasizes patience (Eph. 6:4). The father Jesus describes, just as our heavenly Father, loves

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

unconditionally, forgives without strings attached, and gives abundantly (Luke 15:11–32). Still, Scripture presents a tender side to fatherhood: A temple official came to Jesus frantic for his daughter’s healing (Matt. 9:18–26); Jacob and David displayed deep sorrow at the loss of their sons (Gen. 37:33–35; 2 Sam. 13:35–39); both¹²

Ephesians 5:18

5:18 The tense of the Greek for **be filled** makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by “continually being filled,” as commanded here.¹³

Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ *And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, NKJV*

4:1–16 Paul extensively presented the doctrinal basis of the Christian life (Eph. 1–3). He then gave practical applications of these doctrines (Eph. 4–6), with emphasis on a believer’s “walk” or lifestyle.

We never cry out to God and receive a returned check stamped “Insufficient Grace.”
Sandy Smith

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS: A QUALITY PRECIOUS TO GOD

Those who walk in the Spirit possess a quality of gentleness that is one of the hallmarks necessary for Christian unity. Paul challenges believers to a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus that is characterized by lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, mutual forbearance, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3).

“Gentleness” or “meekness” (Gk. *praut s*) refers to a humble, submissive attitude that is the opposite of pride. Not to be confused with weakness, gentleness is strength that is submitted to God and channeled into service to others. The Old Testament characterizes God as gentle (2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35). The New Testament describes Jesus as “gentle

¹² Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (Eph 3:1–5:33). Thomas Nelson.

¹³ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Believers, like their Lord, should pursue gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11) and wear it like a garment (Col. 3:12).

The godly virtue of gentleness, which is a quality of the heart, is counted as being more influential than outward beauty in winning an unbelieving husband to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1–4). A gentle spirit is precious to God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit necessary for godliness (holy, Christlike living), goodness (kindness toward others), and giftedness (service in the name of Jesus).

See also notes on Encouragement (Eph. 4); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Humility (Phil. 2); Submission (1 Pet. 3); Wives (Prov. 31)

4:12–16 These gifted individuals seek to equip other believers to do the work of the ministry by leading them into doctrinal and practical stability. This mutual edification (v. 12) will continue until the church reaches maturity and unity (v. 13). The mature church will no longer be led astray doctrinally (v. 14) and will exhibit the character qualities of Christ by mutually edifying itself (vv. 15, 16).

4:17–19 The Ephesians were admonished to avoid the lifestyle typical of unbelieving Gentiles all around them. This lifestyle was characterized by “futility,” being empty and without purpose. The understanding of unbelievers had been darkened because they had chosen not to receive God’s revelation (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4); they were “alienated” or separated from the life of God and so were unable to hear His voice; they were willfully ignorant of God and His truth (see 2 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:4); and their hearts had become blinded and calloused so that they were insensitive to God and had no fear of the consequences of their actions (see John 12:37–40). They had given themselves over to self-indulgent immorality characterized by an insatiable desire for more.

4:22–24 Unlike the unbelievers described, the Ephesians had learned life-changing new truth in Christ: Believers are to put off “the old man,” a phrase referring to the sinful lifestyle driven by desires that deceptively promised joy but did not give it; they are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew their thought patterns, changing them from impurity to holiness (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8); they are to put on “the new man,” a phrase referring to a new lifestyle of holiness and righteous living. This new lifestyle is put on positionally when a person receives Christ and needs to be lived out experientially through the Spirit’s empowering (Col. 3:9, 10).

4:26, 27 God has a plan for dealing with anger (see Ps. 13, Healing; Eccl. 7, Anger; chart, How Can You Prevent Inappropriate Anger).

ENCOURAGEMENT: A GIFT FOR YOUR HEARER

Paul's words admonish us to speak only good, not corrupt, words—ones that build up, encourage, and edify. Our words are to constitute a gift to the hearer (Eph. 4:29).

Jesus and Paul are examples for us in their use of uplifting words to encourage. Even when his ship started to sink, Paul gave words of encouragement (Acts 27:22). When Jesus' disciples were sinking, He spoke encouragement to them (Matt. 14:27). When Paul was being persecuted, the Lord appeared beside him and encouraged him (Acts 23:11).

Many people are bowed down under heavy emotional loads and are weary of life's struggles. How eager they are to hear a word of encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)! Often we turn the other way, but the Lord wants to give us kind words to say if we are willing to make ourselves available (Is. 50:4).

In Proverbs, the book of wisdom, much is written about the value of encouraging words (Prov. 16:24; 25:11). Not only do pleasant words taste sweet, but their use can lift us up to high places (Prov. 22:11). Whether we want to be encouragers because Jesus said "be of good cheer," because Paul urged us to "take heart," or because we are simply called to lift up the weary, edify the saints, and evangelize the lost—whatever our reason for wishing to bring sweetness to the soul, now is the time to start (James 4:17). See also Deut. 1:21, 29, 30; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 145:14; Mic. 2:7; Luke 22:32; Acts 13:15, note; Heb. 3:13; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Love (1 John 4); Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12)

4:30 Believers should not grieve the Holy Spirit through sins such as unwholesome speech (v. 29) and the outpouring of repressed anger (v. 31). Since only persons can be grieved, this verse affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

4:32 The basis for believers forgiving others is the fact that they themselves have been graciously forgiven by God (Gk. *charizomai*), and released from any *obligation* to make restitution (see Ps. 133, He¹⁴

7:9 Anger can cause us to act foolishly. The wise woman controls her temper rather than being controlled by it. Undisciplined anger can destroy our lives. *Qoheleth* warns us not to get angry too quickly (see Prov. 14:7; James 1:19; chart, The Answer to Inappropriate Anger).

ANGER: ACT OR REACT

Anger can most often be defined as an emotional response to a perceived wrong or injustice. Hence, anger is normally expressed when a woman misinterprets

¹⁴ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Eph 4:1–32). Thomas Nelson.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

circumstances, makes a mistake in judgment, or reacts quickly because she feels threatened or hurt. This anger is unjustified and sinful. This anger, in effect, denies the power of God to care for your needs and hurts and can even completely take over your life. There are many warnings about the danger of anger in Scripture (Eccl. 7:9; Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:26, 31). Most often, you should leave your anger or wrath at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to act in your behalf.

God's anger is always perfectly controlled and expressed (Ps. 30:5; 78:38). There are examples of righteous anger given in Scripture, such as Moses' anger toward the children of Israel for not trusting God and following Him (Ex. 32:19). Righteous anger can be described as one that results when God's laws and His will are knowingly disobeyed. The concern must be for righteousness and reconciliation, never for personal vengeance coming out of our own hurts. We must be careful to take our anger to the Lord for Him to analyze and manage.

Do you act or *react*? The answer to this simple question will most likely reveal any weaknesses you have in expressing the emotion of anger. A person who *acts* knows who she is, what she believes, and how she should behave (Col. 3:23, 24). She not only knows this information, but she chooses to act upon it. Another person's actions do not dictate her reactions, but rather the wisdom of the Lord is her mainstay (Col. 3:16, 17).

See also Ps. 85:4–7; 103:8, 9; Prov. 15:1; 22:24; 29:22; Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:26, 31; chart on The Emotions of Jesus (Mark 1); notes on Attributes of God (Deut. 32); Bitterness (Heb. 12); Competition (1 Cor. 4); Conflict (Song 5; Matt. 18); Emotions (Ps. 42); Forgiveness (Ps. 51; Luke 17); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Eph. 4; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Jealousy (Song 8¹⁵)

4:1–3 In Eph 1–3, Paul affirms that Gentiles (non-Jews) have been reconciled to God and brought into His people. That discussion provides the starting point for chs. 4–6, where Paul explains how believers should live in the unity and peace accomplished through Christ (2:11–22). Paul begins by emphasizing the oneness of God's people (vv. 1–6). The material in vv. 4–6 might reflect an early Christian confession of faith (compare 1 Cor 8:6).

4:1 prisoner in the Lord See note on Eph 3:1.

live The Greek word used here, *peripateō*, means “walk,” but it often carries the sense of “conduct yourselves.” Paul uses this word throughout chs. 4–5 (see vv. 17; 5:2, 8, 15).

worthy of the calling God's act of creating one family in Christ requires His children to live in a manner that honors His work.

4:2 humility and gentleness, with patience Natural results of being filled with God's Spirit. Compare Gal 5:22–23.

putting up with one another Since believers belong to one family of God, they must bear with one another. Compare Phil 2:1–5.

¹⁵ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). [*The Woman's Study Bible*](#) (Ec 7:9). Thomas Nelson.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

4:3 unity of the Spirit Refers to unity that can only exist because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

bond of peace Earlier, Paul portrays Christ as the personification of peace (Eph 2:14). The work of Christ leads to peace between God and humanity and between Jews and Gentiles (2:15).

4:4 one body and one Spirit Compare 1 Cor 12:12–14.

4:5 one faith, one baptism In the NT, a new believer's expression of faith is closely connected to their baptism—an outward expression of that faith. See note on Acts 2:38; note on Rom 6:3.

Baptism

4:6 God and Father of all See note on Eph 3:15.

over all, and through all, and in all Stresses the supremacy of God. He joins all people together under His sovereign rule.

4:7–16 In this passage, Paul focuses on God's gifts that build up the body of Christ (the Church). The NT lists areas of spiritual giftedness five times (vv. 11–12; 1 Cor 12:4–11, 28–30; Rom 12:3–8; 1 Pet 4:7–11). Each list presents different gifts and emphases.

4:7 grace In this context, the Greek word used here, *charis*, likely refers to a believer's God-given calling and ability to serve in ministry. Paul associated God's grace with his vocation as apostle to the Gentiles (Eph 3:2).

4:8 Paul quotes Psa 68:18 in reference to Christ's ascension (Acts 1:9). Psalm 68:15–18 describes God defeating evil at Mount Bashan, which represented the gateway to the underworld in Israelite and Canaanite thought. Paul quotes the psalm to express Christ's victory over evil powers (Eph 1:19–22; compare Col 2:15).

gave gifts to men The psalm Paul quotes (Psa 68:18) describes God *receiving* gifts of plunder or tribute from a defeated foe. Paul adapts the wording to describe God *giving* spiritual gifts to the Church.

4:9 descended to the lower regions The descent described in Eph 4:9–10 could be interpreted as Christ's descent into the underworld after His death (compare 1 Pet 3:18–22; note on 1 Pet 3:19). Alternatively, the descent could refer to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit empowered the apostles (Acts 2:4; compare 16:6), or to Jesus' incarnation, when the Word (Jesus) descended from heaven to earth (John 1:1–5, 14).

4:10 the one who ascended See note on v. 10.

4:11 Paul's description here of particular roles (or offices) in the Church resembles his description in 1 Cor 12:28, but includes additional roles and does not include others (see note on 1 Cor 12:28). These roles are for advancing God's work in the world through the Church.

apostles Refers to those who are sent out by Christ to speak and act with special authority. See note on Eph 2:20; note on 1 Cor 12:28.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

prophets Refers to those who are designated by God to speak on His behalf. See note on Eph 2:20; note on 1 Cor 12:10.

evangelists Refers to those who proclaim the truth of the gospel and call others to live by Jesus' standards (compare Acts 21:8; 2 Tim 4:5).

pastors Refers to those who care for, or protect, the Church. Since the Greek word used here, *poimēn*, literally means “shepherd” and is often translated as such, this role corresponds with the NT portrayal of the Church as God's flock (1 Pet 5:2; Acts 20:28).

teachers Indicates those who faithfully pass on the teachings of Christ and the apostles, especially through explaining or applying Scripture (compare Titus 2:1).

4:12 work of the ministry Refers to acts of service.

building up the body of Christ Refers to strengthening the Church and helping it grow.

4:13 The unity of the faith Compare Eph 4:3–6.

knowledge Indicates knowledge that comes from experience—knowing Christ, not just knowing about Him.

Son of God See note on Rom 1:3.

4:14 infants Figuratively describes those who are immature in the faith. Compare 1 Cor 3:1; Gal 4:3; 1 Thess 2:7; Heb 5:13.

wind of teaching Refers to false teaching, which leads people astray.

4:15 speaking the truth in love Paul encourages believers to provide guidance with gentleness, **keeping in mind the recipient's best interests.**

head Compare Eph 1:22; 5:23; Col 2:10.

4:16 whole body The Church is one unified group directed by Christ to accomplish His purposes—yet there are many parts to it. Paul uses this metaphor to explain how many people with different roles and gifts can work together in unity (compare 1 Cor 12:12–20).

4:17–32 Continuing his emphasis on unity, Paul urges believers to abandon former ways of living that have nothing to do with Christ. He reminds them of their previous life apart from God (Eph 4:17–19) and exhorts them to discard the old self, since they have been made new in Christ (vv. 20–24). As members of Christ's body, believers are called to show integrity, kindness, and grace. They must overcome bitterness and anger and learn to forgive (vv. 25–32).

4:17 no longer walk Just as believers are to walk in a manner worthy of Christ (v. 1), they are not to walk in the ways of their former life. The believer's new life in Christ involves a change in direction and conduct.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

futility of their mind When they lived apart from God, the Gentiles' entire way of thinking was ineffectual, distorted by the powers of sin (2:1–3).

4:18 alienated Gentiles were not only excluded from Israel (2:12); they were cut off from the very life of God. Their ignorance of God and His ways led to enmity with God (2:12–13), resulting in the need for reconciliation.

hardness of their heart The Gentiles' exclusion from the life of God resulted not only from their ignorance, but from their willful and stubborn rejection of Him.

4:19 gave themselves over Refers to rejecting God and His ways (compare Rom 1:24–32).

4:20 learn Christ Refers not only to conversion to the Christian faith, but also to the activity of learning about Christ.

4:21 if indeed The Greek expression used here, *ei ge*, is sometimes translated using a conditional statement (“if”), but it actually implies confidence. Paul's point is that his audience *does* know and follow Christ. The same expression begins Eph 3:2.

4:22 former way of life Refers to life under the influence of the evil one, the desires of the flesh, and the world (2:1–3).

the old man A personification of the former way of life, before following Christ, which was self-destructive.

4:24 put on the new man As in v. 22, Paul uses the imagery of changing one's clothes to describe believers' responsibility to actively participate in Christ's transformative work in their lives (compare Col 3:9–10; 2 Cor 5:17).

4:25 members of one another Relates to believers being the body of Christ (Eph 4:15–16).

4:26 Be angry and do not sin Paul quotes Psalm 4:4 from the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the OT). Paul seems to acknowledge that anger can be unavoidable, but he also recognizes that it can quickly develop into an occasion for sin.

4:27 nor give place to the devil Believers are free from the devil's rule (Eph 2:2), and they should not allow him to cause division or influence their actions.

4:28 with his own hands Paul calls believers to work for the sake of others (compare 2:10).

4:30 do not grieve the Holy Spirit Paul seems to be indicating that poor treatment of others can constrain the work of the Spirit—essentially denying or resisting God's indwelling presence (compare Isa 63:10).

sealed See note on Eph 1:13.

day of redemption Refers to the Day of the Lord, when Christ will return (see note on 1 Thess 5:2).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

4:32 forgiving one another The Greek word used here, *charizomai*, implies not only forgiving, but doing so with a gracious attitude. Paul uses this same word elsewhere to describe God’s forgiveness (e.g., Col 2:13).¹⁶

FOR 3:19

Interpreting First Peter 3:18–22

First Peter 3:18–22 is one of the most difficult passages in the NT to understand due to the cryptic statements of 1 Peter 3:19–20, where Peter describes Christ as preaching to disobedient “spirits in prison”—an event that is apparently linked to the time of Noah and the flood (Gen 6). Various interpretations have been proposed regarding this passage.

One option holds that Christ descended into the Underworld (Sheol, Hades, hell, or Tartarus) in connection with His death on the cross. Before His resurrection, while still “in the spirit” (1 Pet 3:18), He made a proclamation to the deceased human souls imprisoned in the Underworld. In this view, the “spirits” in 1 Peter 3:19 are the same as the “dead” in 1 Peter 4:6. Still, some options regarding the identification of these imprisoned souls and the purpose of Jesus’ message remain: Christ’s descent may have provided the dead of Noah’s generation with an opportunity for salvation; alternatively, it may have provided salvation for the OT righteous; or, it brought about condemnation for the unbelieving generation of Noah.

A related view is that the pre-incarnate Christ visited the generation of Noah in their lifetime, rather than in the Underworld after His death, preaching repentance from sin. This view was popular in the medieval era but has largely been rejected by modern interpreters. Essentially, the possibility that souls in the Underworld could repent after death poses a theological difficulty. Given this, another interpretation suggests that Christ descended into the Underworld to announce salvation to the people who had repented of their sins just prior to death.

Most of these interpretations understand the “spirits” as a reference to the souls of the human dead; however, the NT never uses the word for “spirit” in an unqualified fashion to refer to the human soul. **Therefore, the reference in 1 Peter 3:19 may point to nonhuman supernatural beings.** This interpretation is strengthened when the passage is read in the context of Genesis 6–9 because of the reference to Noah and the flood in 1 Pet 3:20. The flood reference also draws in the traditions of 1 Enoch, so the “spirits in prison” may have been understood to be the fallen angels or “sons of God” of Genesis 6:1–4. Enoch, as in Genesis 5:21–24, prefigures Christ in that God sent Enoch to the fallen spirits—the sons of God who cohabitated with human women (Genesis 6:1–4)—to announce their impending doom (see 1 Enoch 1:9; 10:1–10; Jude 14 and note). For Peter, Jesus is the new Enoch; He proclaimed victory over the powers of evil through His actions on the cross.

These three interpretive possibilities developed out of the various theological questions raised by the passage. Why would Christ preach to imprisoned spirits of the dead? Can the dead respond in

¹⁶ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Eph 4:1–32). Lexham Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

faith? By the same token, why would Christ preach to imprisoned fallen angels, emphasizing His victory and their defeat? Despite these questions, understanding the context provided by Second Temple Jewish literature and its expansions on the Genesis traditions offers the closest parallel for understanding the cultural and literary allusions that might have been evident to the letter's original audience: Christian Jews of the first century AD.

As the final option considered above, this culturally anchored interpretation can be summarized as follows. First, Peter expands on the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection: at some point, Jesus affirmed the condemnation of the fallen angels who had rebelled prior to the flood and had been imprisoned by God. Peter then employs the analogy of the salvation of Noah and his family through water to describe the salvation of believers through baptism: just as Noah was saved by righteousness, believers are saved by faith; baptism is symbolic of their act of faith. Peter emphasizes this by stating how baptism saves by an appeal to Christ's resurrection, not the physical washing of water baptism. Essentially, Christ's resurrection has eternal implications for the divine beings that rebelled against God. The resurrected Christ is now elevated to the right hand of God with authority over all other angelic beings.

DOUGLAS MANGUM¹⁷

Eph.

4:1 Prisoner of the Lord: See also 3:1 and 6:20, which remind us that although the writer is in jail, he still maintains that his real captor is Christ. **Worthy** means "of sufficient weight," a quality issuing from acknowledging what Christ has poured into us, rather than whatever worth is felt or unfelt in oneself.

4:2 Unity is the responsibility of each believer and is to be pursued earnestly.

4:5 One baptism probably refers to water baptism, the common external point of publicly declaring faith in Jesus Christ. The issue is not the form of the ritual as much as the fact of one's obedience. The believer's baptism *by* the Holy Spirit *into* Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13) and the baptism *in* or *with* the Holy Spirit *for* power-filled service (John 1:33; Acts 1:5, 8) are facts unchallenged by this observation. They clearly stand as spiritual realities linked in a tri-unity with the one baptism in water.

4:8 Gifts . . . gave some: The five ministry offices listed here are gifts that Christ gave for the nurture and equipping of His church, not for hierarchical control or ecclesiastical competition. Beyond the distinct role filled by the original founding apostles (see note on 2:20), the NT mentions enough additional apostles to indicate that this office, with that of prophets, is as continuing a ministry in the church as the more commonly acknowledged offices of evangelists, pastors, and teachers (some make pastor-teacher one office). There is no prescribed formula or "gift-mix" for any particular office, as God uses different people in different ways in each of these five ministries Christ has given. Uniqueness is manifested in individuals according to the

¹⁷ Mangum, D. (2012, 2016). [Interpreting First Peter 3:18–22](#). In *Faithlife Study Bible*. Lexham Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

varied gifts God the Father has given them (Rom. 12:3-8) and joined with whatever gifts the Holy Spirit distributes to or through them (1 Cor. 12:4-11). The distinct gifts of the Father (Rom. 12), the Son (Eph. 4), and the Spirit (1 Cor. 12) ought not to be confused, nor should any of the five ministry offices in this text be limited to the operation of any particular gift.

4:9 Paul explains that the quote from Ps. 68:18 (v. 8) applies to the **ascended** Christ. An ascent implies a prior descent. Christ's descent **into the lower parts of the earth** has been variously interpreted as a descent into hell (associating it with 1 Pet. 3:19), a descent into Sheol/Hades (the realm of the dead (see Acts 2:25-35)), or as symbolically referring to His incarnation (whereby Christ descended to Earth from heaven), a descent carrying Him to the depths of humiliation (see Phil. 2:5-11). With reference to the view that He descended into hell, there is no biblical support for the notion that Jesus suffered in hell, only that He descended to Sheol to release the righteous dead into eternal glory, proclaiming the adequacy of the Atonement and validating the testimony of the prophets.

KINGDOM DYNAMICS

4:11 The Gifts Christ Gives, SPIRITUAL GIFTS. Distinguishing among the gifts of Rom. 12:6-8 (from the Father), the gifts of 1 Cor. 12:8-10 (from the Holy Spirit), and those here, which are explicitly given by Christ the Son (v. 8), is pivotal in comprehending the whole scope of spiritual gifts. An elaboration of this and related themes appears in the study article on page 2018, "Holy Spirit Gifts and Power."

WORD WEALTH

4:12 equipping, *katartismos* (kat-ar-tis-moss); Strong's #2677: A making fit, preparing, training, perfecting, making fully qualified for service. In classical language the word is used for setting a bone during surgery. The Great Physician is now making all the necessary adjustments so the church will not be "out of joint."

4:12 The Greek word for **equipping** implies: 1) a recovered wholeness as when a broken limb is set and mends; 2) a discovered function, as when a physical member is properly operating. The **work of ministry** is the enterprise of each member of the body of Christ and not the exclusive charge of select leaders. Taken together, vv. 11, 12 reveal that the task of the gifted leader is to cultivate the individual and corporate ministries of those he or she leads.

4:13 A progress in maturity (v. 13), stability (v. 14), and integrity (v. 15), taking place in every individual member's experience, results in the whole body's **growth** (numerical expansion) and **edifying** (internal strengthening).

4:17 Five traits of a worldly walk are summed up in the word **futility** (emptiness, purposelessness): darkened understanding, alienation from God, ignorance of God's way, hardened heart, and an unfeeling state. (The Greek word means "to have ceased to care.")

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

4:17 See section 2 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

4:20 This section asserts each believer's accountability to live in contrast with the surrounding culture, since the five traits of the worldling are no longer true of him.

4:22 The old man . . . the new man contrasts the old life-style dominated by the spirit of disobedience (2:1-3) with the believer's newly created capacity for a life-style of obedience by the Holy Spirit's power (2:10; 3:16).

4:25 See section 3 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

4:26 Being **angry** may win a moment, but it is not to be allowed to win a day.

4:27 The Greek word for **place** (*topos*) emphasizes that believers can actually give ground in their lives to satanic control. This is a warning against theologized suppositions that argue against the possibility that demonic vexing or oppression may succeed with Christians. But the surrounding commands balance the issue (v. 17-5:14), making clear that responsible believers cannot glibly blame the Devil for sin they yield to in carnal disobedience.

4:28 See section 7 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

4:28 Note that the first motive for a believer to earn money is **that he may have something to give**. The occupational enterprise of Christians is not simply to make a living, but to make possible their being instruments of God's service to mankind through their work and giving.

4:29 See section 4 of Truth-In-Action at the end of Eph.

4:29 Corrupt is literally "decayed, rotten," as used for spoiled meat, rotted fruit, or crumbled stones.

4:30 The Holy Spirit has **sealed** ("authorized as a representative," 1:13) and dwells in the inner man (3:16). If He is grieved, the believer will be the first to know. **Grieve** means to cause injury or distress, the precise feeling the believer senses when sin or disobedience finds its place.

4:32 Jesus taught the duty of **forgiving . . . even as God**, and showed it to be fundamental to having one's own prayers for forgiveness answered (see Matt. 6:14, 15; 18:21-35).¹⁸

4:1-16 Unity of the Body

By recounting his imprisonment in the service of the Lord, Paul cultivates in his audience a sense of responsibility to honor through their Christian conduct his suffering for their sake. That he lacks a founder's authority (though not apostolic authority) over his target congregations may lead him to frame his exhortations as a plea (v. 1). The fact of Christian unity (vv. 4-6) provides the basis for acting accordingly (vv. 2-3). The task of the church as a whole consists in growing up theologically for effectiveness in further building itself up (vv. 13-16). Leaders and laypeople share responsibility for this task as they perform their variously vital ministerial functions (vv. 11-

¹⁸ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Eph 4:1-32). Thomas Nelson.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

12). On believers' receipt of spiritual gifts after Christ's ascension to heaven (vv. 7–10), compare the advantage of the Holy Spirit cited by Jesus to comfort the apostles concerning his imminent departure from earth (John 15:26–16:13).

Women in the Early Church

Attitudes toward women in the 1st-century church were heavily influenced by two major sources—the history of Judaism and the example of Jesus. Jewish Christians knew, and Gentile Christians were quickly taught, the major themes of the Old Testament. On the one hand, God had created man and woman alike in his image to rule over the rest of creation (Gen. 1:26–31) and had created Eve to be a suitable helper for Adam (2:18), an expression that suggests equality more than subordination. On the other hand, the first couple fell into sin, after which God promised the woman, “your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (3:16). No debate surrounds the fact that after this point gender relations throughout the Old Testament were highly patriarchal.

But Jesus came to reverse the effects of the fall, and his teaching and example regularly challenged the conventions that had come to characterize 1st-century Judaism. He regularly treated women with a dignity that surprised or upset men in his culture. Perhaps the two most dramatic examples involved his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1–42) and his acceptance of Mary of Bethany in the role of a rabbi's disciple (Luke 10:38–42). Jesus risked the perception of scandal by allowing women to travel with him and his disciples (and to support them financially; Luke 8:1–3), and one of these, Mary Magdalene, formerly demon-possessed, became the first witness to the resurrection and an “apostle to the apostles” (John 20:1–2, 18). Still, Jesus did not choose a woman among his 12 closest followers, though the significance of this observation remains disputed.

The book of Acts contains no instructions regarding gender roles, but it does present a significant number of examples of women in prominent positions. Women as well as men prophesy (Acts 2:17–21), Priscilla (with her husband Aquila) teaches Apollos “the Way of God more accurately” (18:26), and Paul is willing to preach to an all-female assembly, from which the first European convert, Lydia, emerges (17:11–15). From the epistles we learn of numerous other prominent women leaders in the church and coworkers with Paul during this first Christian generation: Phoebe is a deacon and a patron (Rom. 16:1–2); Junia is an apostle, in the broader sense of missionary or church planter (v. 7); Chloe and Nympha and their (apparently fatherless) households figure prominently (1 Cor. 1:11; Col. 4:15); and Euodia, Syntyche, and others are fellow laborers in the gospel whom Paul values (Phil. 4:2–3; cf. Rom. 16:6, 12).

Mosaic of Saint Perpetua from the Euphrasius basilica in Pored, Croatia. (*Wikimedia Commons*)

Paul does continue to command women to submit to their husbands, not simply as a vestige of the old order but comparable to the church's submission to Christ (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18). But he also commands mutual submission (Eph. 5:21) and radically redefines male authority as not greater privilege but greater responsibility (vv. 25–33). The most probable interpretation of Peter's reference to married women as “weaker vessels” (1 Pet. 3:7) highlights

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

their greater vulnerability in their voluntarily adopted role of subordination. On the other hand, 1 Cor. 12:7, 11 makes clear that God's Spirit gives his gifts as the Spirit determines, none of which appear to be gender-specific. Galatians 3:28 clearly declares that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." At the very least, these texts suggest that men and women, as in creation, are equally valuable in God's eyes; neither is inherently inferior to the other.

Whether Paul means more than this and is in principle abolishing all role differentiation in the church remains debated. At least in his world, he never takes this step. He commands women to cover their heads as a sign of respect in worship (1 Cor. 11:3–16). He assumes that women may pray and prophesy in church (11:5), but instructs that they should refrain from specific kinds of speech (14:33b–38)—perhaps asking questions during the evaluation of prophecy or expressing views contrary to his own. "Prophecy" in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts could refer to spontaneous utterances of messages believed to be from God (or a god) but also to thoughtfully prepared addresses equally attributed to the divine. Apparently Paul allowed women to do what today would be called preaching.

In the most scrutinized text of all, Paul forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12). But the grammatical construction used here, coupled with the observation that teaching and exercising authority are two distinctives of the office of elder/overseer in 1 Timothy (3:2; 5:17), suggest that Paul is merely prohibiting women from the single office of elder or overseer. A discussion of the criteria for overseers and deacons immediately follows, with probable references to women deacons but not to women elders (3:1–13). Nevertheless, the word for having authority in 2:12 is found nowhere else in Scripture and in other Greek literature can mean "to domineer," so perhaps Paul is prohibiting only an overly harsh use of authority, especially in light of the false teaching with which Timothy's church in Ephesus was infected.

Debate also continues over Paul's reasons for his various prohibitions. On the one hand, he regularly refers to the order of creation to buttress gender role distinctions, suggesting that his teaching cannot be dismissed as limited to his time and culture (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 14:34). On the other hand, it is possible that new creation in Christ goes beyond even original creation (Gal. 3:28), so the question of contemporary application is by no means settled.

For Further Reading

Beck, James R., and Craig L. Blomberg, eds. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.

Belleville, Linda L. *Women Leaders and the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000.

Piper, John, and Wayne A. Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1991.

CRAIG L. BLOMBERG

4:17–5:20 Christian Conduct

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Christ is the cornerstone of the church 2:20

Christ is the Savior and sanctifier of the church 5:23, 26–27

Christ gives the church ministry workers 4:11–16

Christ loved and sacrificed himself for the church 5:25

Christ nourishes and cherishes the church 5:29

the church and her members dwell and grow in Christ 2:21–22; 4:15

the church is a means through which God manifests his manifold wisdom 3:10

the church submits to Christ 5:24

the church is Christ's body, and believers are members of his body 1:22–23; 3:6; 4:4, 16; 5:23, 30

4:4 Spirit. Just as a human body has one spirit that animates it, so Christ's body, the church, is enlivened by one Holy Spirit who enlivens Christians to eternal life. **one hope.** Christians do not have separate "hopes" but are together called to eternal life and to enjoy God forever in resurrection glory. They are also called to express that unity this side of eternity. On the church as a **body**, see Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:12–31.

4:5 One Lord refers to Jesus Christ. **One faith** refers to the doctrinal truths Christians commonly confess. "One Spirit" (v. 4), "one Lord [Christ]" (v. 5), and "one God and Father" (v. 6) constitute a Trinitarian formula. **one baptism.** Christians have disagreed about the proper mode of baptism beginning in the early history of the church. "One baptism" here, however, may refer to the baptism of all believers into one body (as described in 1 Cor. 12:13), which is the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit when one becomes a genuine believer in Christ. If this view is correct, water baptism would be an outward sign of the inward reality of the believer being in Christ as the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5, 8; Titus 3:5). There is therefore a profound spiritual unity of all genuine believers who are "in Christ" (see John 17:21, 23), founded on "one faith" in "one Lord," irrespective of denominational differences. Others hold that the reference here is to water baptism, but would disagree concerning the proper mode.

4:6 over all ... through all ... in all. God is omnipresent (see Ps. 139:7–12; Isa. 66:1). Thus the Christian church is "one body" (Eph. 4:4), wherever its separate congregations may be found throughout the world (see Rom. 3:30).

4:7–10 The Different Gifts. Paul describes diverse gifts in the church. These come from the ascended Christ.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

4:7 Grace ... according to the measure of Christ's gift does not refer to different levels of *saving* grace but of grace given to serve Christ's church. To hold an office in Christ's church (see 3:2; 4:11–16) requires a special calling from Christ himself, who rules his body as its head (see 1:22; 4:15; 5:23).

4:8 it says. Paul cites Ps. 68:18, where the one who ascends is the triumphant Lord God. Paul sees this as referring to Christ Jesus in his resurrection as head of the church. **gifts.** In Ps. 68:18, the divine victor is seen “receiving gifts among men,” but Paul adapts the passage to his purposes (as NT authors sometimes do in citing the OT) to show that Christ **gave** gifts to his people from his spoils of victory (interestingly, ancient Syriac and Aramaic translations of Ps. 68:18 also have “gave”). The “gifts” given by Christ turn out to be the church leaders described in Eph. 4:11. The **captives** over whom Christ triumphed are most likely demons (cf. this theme of victory over demonic forces in 1:19–22).

4:9 lower regions, the earth. In the incarnation, Christ descended from the highest heavens to the lowest regions (i.e., to the earth), where he suffered, died, and was buried, but where he also defeated death and rose again. He then **ascended** (Acts 1:9) 40 days later to be seated in the highest heavens at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33).

4:10 far above. Christ is the supreme head of the church who fills **all things** (see 1:23) with his glory, power, and sovereign prerogative to dispense gifts to his people (see 4:11–16).

4:11–16 The Gifts for Edification of the Church. The list in v. 11 is not complete since deacons are omitted. The focus here is gifted people who articulate the gospel.

4:11 Christ gives specific spiritual gifts to people in the church whose primary mission is to minister the Word of God (v. 12). For **apostles**, see note on 1:1. Regarding **prophets**, different views on the nature of the gift of prophecy in the NT affect one's understanding of this verse (see notes on 2:20; 1 Cor. 12:10). Since the Greek construction here is different from Eph. 2:20 and 3:5, some see this verse as a broader reference to the gift of prophecy generally in the NT church, rather than a reference to the “foundational” prophets mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5. From the Greek word for the “gospel” (*euangelion*), **evangelists** denotes people like Philip and Timothy who proclaimed the gospel (Acts 21:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). **shepherds** (or “pastors” [ESV footnote]). In the OT these are kings and judges (2 Sam. 5:2; 7:7). In the NT, elders “shepherd” by watching over and nurturing the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–2). There is some uncertainty as to whether “shepherds and **teachers**” refers here to two different ministry roles or functions, or whether the reference is to a single “shepherd-teacher” ministry role (cf. ESV footnote), since Paul uses a different Greek conjunction at the end of the list, joining the two nouns more closely together than the other nouns in the list. If “teachers” are a separate group, they can be understood as a special branch of shepherds (overseers, elders) responsible for instruction in God's Word (cf. 1 Tim. 5:17).

4:12 Those church leaders with various gifts (v. 11) are to **equip the saints** (all Christians) so that they can do **the work of ministry**. All Christians have spiritual gifts that should be used in ministering to one another (1 Cor. 12:7, 11; 1 Pet. 4:10).

4:13 The diversity of gifts serves to bring about the **unity** of Christ's people. **Mature manhood** extends the body metaphor used earlier for the church and contrasts with “children” in the next verse (see Heb. 5:11–14). Some people think that the learning of doctrine is inherently divisive, but it is *people* who divide the church, whereas the **knowledge of the Son of God** (both knowing

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

Christ personally and understanding all that he did and taught) is edifying and brings about “mature manhood” when set forth in love (Phil. 3:10). The work of the gifted ministers (Eph. 4:11) was to proclaim and teach the word centered on Christ rather than on speculative or eccentric teachings of their own (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2). **measure**. Christ Jesus is the standard of the maturity to which the church must aspire. Christ’s **fullness** is the full expression of his divine and human perfection (see Eph. 1:23; 3:19; Col. 1:19; 2:9).

4:14 children. Immaturity in the truths of Christian doctrine makes the church like gullible children tossed helplessly by the **waves** and **wind** of **cunning** and **deceitful schemes** of false teachers (1 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 4:1–3; Jude 4; Rev. 2:2).

4:15 The truth must not be used as a club to bludgeon people into acceptance and obedience but must always be presented **in love**. The truth leads the Christian to maturity, which is defined here as growing up **into Christ**. As **head**, Christ leads, directs, and guides the body (see 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3).

4:16 joint. Paul continues the body metaphor to describe the church’s maturity. Every member (i.e., every believer, viewed as a limb, or unit, in Christ’s body) plays a crucial role in this growth. **in love**. There is no Christian maturity or true Christian ministry without love (1 Corinthians 13), and every act of love in the name of Christ is valued and remembered by him, as **each part is working properly** (illustrated in Eph. 4:25–32; cf. Matt. 25:31–43; 26:6–13).

4:17–24 Paul’s Testimony. Paul testifies to the new life in Christ experienced by the Gentile Christians of Ephesus.

4:17–18 Paul affirms most solemnly **in the Lord** that his Gentile readers, as part of the new creation, should no longer live **as the Gentiles do** (vv. 22–24; Col. 3:9–10). **futility of their minds ... darkened**. Both in antiquity and today, people who reject the knowledge of God think of themselves as “enlightened” (cf. Heb. 10:32). Their **ignorance** here is not lack of general education; some are brilliant in their own way, but such brilliance is all wasted and futile in the end when combined with **hardness of heart** toward the truth of the gospel in Christ (cf. Matt. 13:14–15; John 12:40; Acts 28:26–27; Rom. 11:8).

4:22 put off your old self. As Christians seek to do this, God makes it a reality, as seen in Col. 3:9–10. Even Paul’s Gentile readers can be part of the new creation in Christ. (As the ESV footnote indicates, “self” is the generic Gk. for “man” or “human”—perhaps an allusion to Adamic man apart from Christ.) Ephesians 4:22 describes the negative side of regeneration, while vv. 23–24 point to the positive side. **corrupt**. People need inner transformation because their hearts are “deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9).

4:23 renewed. Paul expressed the negative side of the new creation in v. 22 as putting off the “old self,” while vv. 23–24 express the positive side as an entire transformation of believers’ inner selves, focusing here on their **minds** (see also John 3:3–6; Col. 3:9–10). Christians sometimes distinguish between knowledge of head and of heart, but the Bible shows that they should love and serve the Lord with all that is in them, including their minds, at all times (Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 13:3; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). The “renewal” or “transformation” of the mind (Rom. 12:2) is a process in which believers begin to think in new and right ways as they meditate on the truths of God’s Word.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

4:24 put on the new self (lit., “man”; see note on v. 22). Paul focuses on the individual aspect of the corporate “new man” as described in 2:15. Believers are **created** anew in Christ (see also 2:10). Created **after the likeness of God** further shows the connection with the original creation in Genesis, where “God created man in his own image” (Gen. 1:27; cf. 1 Cor. 15:49).

4:25–32 Exhortation to an Edifying Lifestyle. Paul gives practical examples of how church members build up Christ’s body (cf. vv. 13–16), based on what is true of them as Christians.

4:25 Therefore. In vv. 25–32 Paul will show how Christians are to put into practice the truths explored in vv. 17–24.

4:26–27 Be angry. Not all anger is **sin**, but the believer should not be consumed by anger, nor should one’s anger even be carried over into the next day, as this will only **give an opportunity to the devil**.

4:28 Paul uses the thief to illustrate how repentance impacts one’s lifestyle. Repentance involves both stopping (negative) and starting (positive). The thief must stop stealing and start doing **honest work**. Stealing arises out of laziness and greed, so the repentant thief must display the opposite: diligence at **labor** and willingness to **share**.

4:29 corrupting talk. As with the “stopping” and “starting” noted in v. 28, Christians are to stop evil speech, substituting talk that is **good for building up** and giving **grace**. “Corrupting” (Gk. *sapros*) also applies to “bad” (rotten) fruit (Luke 6:43) or “bad” (putrid) fish (Matt. 13:48). To “give grace” in speaking means to benefit others rather than corrupt them through what is said.

4:30 grieve. Grieving the Holy Spirit means to cause him sorrow by one’s sin. **sealed**. See note on 1:13. The **day of redemption** is the day of Christ’s return (see Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:23).

4:31 All bitterness means “every kind of bitterness.” “All” also modifies the other items in the list, telling readers to put away all **wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice**. “Bitterness” may head the list because it so often leads to the other sins that Paul names. Bitterness comes from a heart that is not right before God (Acts 8:21–23); it is a primary characteristic of an unregenerate person (Rom. 3:10–14); and it causes destruction and defilement (Heb. 12:15). Bitterness and resentment are thus incompatible with Christian character and must be **put away**. People often are very careless with their speech (“slander”), even though the tongue can ignite a forest fire of harm to others (James 3:5–6).

4:32 Being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving flows from constantly remembering that God first **forgave** us and that we need his forgiveness daily, as the Lord’s Prayer reminds us: “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matt. 6:12; cf. Luke 11:4).

5:1–20 New Life in Love. After a two-verse transitional section, Paul gives general instructions for holy living. He focuses on purity of life—both by avoiding evil deeds and associations and by adopting holy practices. Verse 21 connects, vv. 1–20 with vv. 22–6:9.

5:1–2 Exhortation to Self-Sacrificial Love. Paul’s discussion of love serves also as an introduction to further instructions on holy living (vv. 3–20). **imitators**. Believers are to imitate God’s holiness in all of their conduct. They are to be like him, not as slaves trying to earn a wage but as **children**—and **beloved** children at that! **loved**. The past tense does not suggest that Christ has *stopped* loving

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

us but only that, when he **gave himself up for us**, it was the supreme act of his love (see John 15:13).²⁰

UNITY SKIT:

Leg bands attaching a group of people together where the middle of the bands are interwoven.

Ask them to do tasks together.

Incommunicable Attributes

- Omnipresent – All Present **Psalm 139:7-16**
- Omnipotent – All Powerful **Revelation 19:6**
- Omniscient - All Knowing **Psalm 33:13-15**
- Immutable – Never Changing **Revelation 1:8**

Ephesians 4:8-10

Luke 11:22 Jesus portrays Himself as someone **stronger** than Satan who overruns Satan's house and gives the spoils of victory to those who are His (see Eph. 4:8, 9 for a similar concept).²¹

TAKING PRISONERS

Psalm 68:18, where Yahweh leads a host of captives, may sound familiar. Paul cites the verse in Ephesians 4:

Psalm 68:18

Ephesians 4:8

You have ascended on high; you have led away captives. You have received gifts from among humankind.

Therefore it says,
"When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (ESV).

If you look closely, there is a problem in the quotation. For Paul, Psalm 68:18 was about Jesus ascending on high and *giving* gifts to humanity. Jesus is somehow the fulfillment of Psalm 68. But the Old Testament text has God ascending and *receiving* gifts.

Reconciling this conflict of ideas requires getting some context first.

Psalm 68 gives us a standard description of conquest, known from other ancient texts and even from ancient sculpture and iconography. The victorious captain of the army leads the enemy captives behind him; they are the human booty of war.

²⁰ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (pp. 2267–2270). Crossway Bibles.

²¹ Radmacher, E. D., Allen, R. B., & House, H. W. (1997). [The Nelson Study Bible: New King James Version](#) (Lk 11:22). T. Nelson Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

When Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8, he does so thinking of Jesus. Part of the confusion over how to interpret what Paul is saying is that so many commentators have assumed that captives are being *liberated* in Ephesians 4. That isn't the case. That idea would flatly contradict the well-understood Old Testament imagery. There is no liberation; there is *conquest*.

Paul's words identify Jesus with Yahweh. In Psalm 68:18 it was Yahweh who is described as the conqueror of the demonic stronghold. For Paul it is Jesus, the incarnate second Yahweh, surrounded by the demonic *elohim*, "bulls of Bashan," fulfilling the imagery of Psalm 68. Jesus puts the evil gods "to an open shame" (ESV) by "triumphing over them by [the cross]" (LEB) (Col 2:15). Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8 are in agreement if one sees conquest, not liberation.

What about the "receiving" and "giving" problem? Paul's wording doesn't deny there was conquest. What it does is point to the *result* of the conquest.

In the ancient world the conqueror would parade the captives and demand tribute for himself. Jesus is the conqueror of Psalm 68, and the booty does indeed rightfully belong to him. But booty was also distributed after a conquest. Paul knows that. He quotes Psalm 68:18 to make the point that after Jesus conquered his demonic enemies, he distributed the benefits of the conquest to his people, believers. Specifically, those benefits are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph 4:11).

But how is Paul getting that idea? He explains himself in Ephesians 4:9–10.

Psalm 68:18

Ephesians 4:8

You have ascended on high; you have led
away captives. You have received gifts
from among humankind.

"When he ascended on high he led a
host of captives, and he gave gifts
to men."

(In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) (ESV).

Christ's conquest results in the dispensing of gifts to his people after ascending (in conquest) in verse 8. But that ascent was accompanied by a descent ("into the lower regions").

Paul's logic is not at all clear, at least at first. What ascent and descent is he talking about? The text does not make clear the order of events, or even whether there *was* an intended order.

The key to understanding Paul's thinking is the descent. There are two possible explanations. The most common view is that, upon his death, Jesus descended into the lower regions *of the earth*. This is the way Ephesians 4:9 is worded in many translations. In this case, the language speaks both of the grave and of cosmic Sheol, the underworld. This is possible since elsewhere in the New Testament we read that Jesus descended into the underworld to confront the "spirits in prison"—the original transgressing sons of God from Genesis 6 (1 Pet 3:18–22). But that visitation may not be Paul's point of reference here.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

The second view is reflected in the ESV, which is the translation I used for Ephesians 4. Note that instead of “lower parts of the earth” the ESV inserts a comma: “the lower regions, the earth.” The effect of the comma is that Jesus descended to “the lower regions, [in other words] *the earth*.” This option fits the context better (the gifts are given to people who are of course on earth) and has some other literary advantages. If this option is correct, then the descent of verses 9–10 does not refer to Jesus’ time in the grave, but rather to the Holy Spirit’s coming to earth after Jesus’ conquering ascension on the day of Pentecost.

JESUS AND THE SPIRIT

This view makes sense in that the ascent (victory) would refer to the resurrection, and the descent would speak of the ensuing coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. *They are both triumphs*. But it raises an obvious question: Is Paul confusing Jesus with the Spirit?

Perhaps we should instead ask, is the Spirit Jesus in some way? The question sounds odd, but it’s akin to asking if the man Jesus is God in some way. The answer, as we’ve seen in previous chapters, is that Jesus is the second Yahweh, the embodied Yahweh of the Old Testament. But Jesus is not the “Father” Yahweh. He therefore *is but isn’t* Yahweh. It’s the same with the Spirit. The Spirit is Yahweh, and so he is Jesus as well, but not incarnate or embodied. The Spirit *is but isn’t* Jesus, just as Jesus *is but isn’t* Yahweh the Father. The same sort of “two Yahwehs” idea from the Old Testament is found in the New Testament with respect to Jesus and the Spirit. *That* is the source of Trinitarian theology.

Viewed against this backdrop, the idea that Jesus and the Spirit might be identified with each other isn’t so strange. In fact, it helps us make sense of some things certain New Testament writers said about the Spirit.

It is clear that Jesus and the Spirit are different persons. That’s clear from passages about Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:16), his temptation (Matt 4:1), and other passages (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 7:55). Jesus also said he and the Father would send the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; cf. Luke 24:49). The Spirit was to come and indwell and empower believers. The events on Pentecost in Acts 2 mark the coming of the Spirit.

But the New Testament also identifies the Spirit with Jesus:

⁶ And they traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been prevented by the Holy Spirit from speaking the message in Asia. ⁷ And when they came to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, and **the Spirit of Jesus** did not permit them (Acts 16:6–7).

⁹ But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. But if anyone does not have **the Spirit of Christ**, this person does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness (Rom 8:9–10).

For I know that this will turn out to me for deliverance through your prayer and the support of **the Spirit of Jesus Christ** (Phil 1:19).

⁴ But when the fullness of time came, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ in order that he might redeem those under the law, in order that we might receive the adoption. ⁶ And because you are sons, God sent out **the Spirit of his Son** into our hearts, crying out, “Abba! (Father!)” (Gal 4:4–6).

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 10: Ephesians 4. THE Church

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace meant for you sought and made careful inquiry, ¹¹investigating for what person or which time **the Spirit of Christ** in them was indicating when he testified beforehand to the sufferings with reference to Christ and the glories after these things (1 Pet 1:10–11).

Paul's quotation directs our attention in two important ways. First, not only did the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross mean the fall of Bashan, emblematic of the cosmic powers of evil, but it also triggered the empowerment of the Church by the gifts of the Spirit. Second, that victory and empowerment also had something to do with Pentecost.

Paul's thought about Pentecost in Ephesians 4 is quite the understatement. As it turned out, what happened at Pentecost cannot be understood without cosmic geography—the Deuteronomy 32 worldview. Like the gospel accounts, there's much more behind Acts 2 than we might have presumed.²²

²² Heiser, M. S. (2015). [*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*](#) (First Edition, pp. 292–295). Lexham Press.