

Provision for Growth in the Church

An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16

How is the Body of Christ supposed to function? What is God's purpose for His people today? This portion of Scripture offers some answers to these questions as it presents a unique perspective of how the Church is to operate. In this context, God paints a literary picture portraying His vision of how we, the members of the Body, can successfully achieve His objectives. From the time I first studied this section in Bible school, it began to make an unforgettable impression on me. Throughout the years, the truths presented have continued to expand my thinking related to how Christians can grasp the manner by which God desires the Church to mature toward spiritual fullness.

The first three chapters of Ephesians provide preliminary background for the working of the Body described in chapter four. These opening chapters feature many spiritual blessings we enjoy because of our righteous position before God in Christ. They focus on the gospel of Grace which explains how God has chosen us in Christ and describes how provision was made for our sin by His blood. Also, through this message, God promises believers a heavenly inheritance with His Son and provides equal access for all men to Himself through Christ. Ultimately, the Church is presented as "the fullness" of God, which encompasses every aspect of our spiritual identity in the Savior (1:23). Finally, as his prayer closes in chapter 3, Paul writes of God's aspiration for the Body to "be filled unto all the fullness of God" (3:19). A few verses later, chapter 4 begins to reveal how the Church can attain this lofty designation.

Characteristic of the style seen in Paul's Letters, the first paragraph of Ephesians 4 outlines principles governing the growth of the Body of Christ. Then, details about these teachings are elaborated on in the remainder of the Book. The following commentary of this section is proposed to stimulate all believers so that we might take a serious look at this road map containing explicit directions for our godly development. May this study assist the Church in attaining the spiritual heights God wishes for us both individually and corporately.

1) "Therefore, I the prisoner in the Lord encourage you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling for which you were called,"

Paul defines himself as "the prisoner in the Lord". Earlier in this Book, he spoke about sufferings he was enduring related to his proclamation of the "administration of the grace of God", which resulted in his confinement (Eph. 3:1-3, 13). Later he

asks Christians to pray for him so he will continue to boldly proclaim this same “mystery” message even though it caused him much affliction (6:19-20). As one who was willing to suffer for the gospel which explains the reasons for which God “called” us, Paul now entreats these Ephesian believers to join him in walking “in a manner worthy” of this “calling”.

The verb translated “encourage” (παρακαλῶ) means *to call beside*. Paul is in effect *inviting* these believers *to his side* in order to *share helpful instruction* concerning how they can conduct life “in a manner worthy” of God. The adverb “worthy” (αξιῶς) describes how Christians are to live *in an appropriate manner* relative to God’s standards. These ideals for Body members are contained in “the calling for which we were called”.

This “calling” (κλήσεως) speaks of the *occupation* which God has given us. Truths undergirding this *spiritual job* are taught in the first three chapters of this Book. The “worthy” activities and character *associated with* (genitive case) “the calling” are discussed in the chapters to follow. The verb rendered “you were called” (ἐκκληθητε) occurs in the *passive voice* indicating we were called by a *force outside of ourselves*. Paul is speaking about a sovereign act of God which *summons* us from our prior state of rebellion to occupy our present privileged position as His children. This call is related to *how God purposed to choose us for salvation before the foundation of the world, then in process of time called us by His love, grace and mercy* (Rom. 8:28-30; 9:11-24; 1 Cor. 1:24-31; Eph. 1:4-6; 2:4-5). The subsequent verses describe specific qualities and practices needed in our lives so we can properly represent God as we carry out His calling” – *heavenly work performed in our earthly bodies*.

It is noteworthy that those who are “called” for this purpose *include every member of the Body of Christ*. Under the Law, priests and other leaders were “called” to their divine vocations, performing ministries which benefitted the Nation of Israel (Heb. 5:4; 11:8). Actually, the Greek root which forms the noun “calling” (κλήσεως) transliterates into the English word “clergy”. Even though a *clergy versus laity* (the Greek word for “people”) *separation* existed under the Law between those who God elevated for ministry and the remaining Jews, *this practice is entirely absent in the Epistles*. Nonetheless, this same traditional distinction is widely practiced in the Church today.

“The calling” God envisioned *is for every believer to be involved in carrying out the ministry* (Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 4:12). As Christians obtain a fuller understanding of this truth, it will revolutionize their outlook on serving God. For, when one realizes the vital role he or she plays as a chosen and gifted member of the divine team assembled for ministry, this generates a great amount of personal worth. And, since our Master Designer individually “called” us to *The Service He*

planned, each of us should be motivated to enthusiastically participate in the work associated with this “calling”.

2) “with all humility and gentleness, with long suffering, while holding up one another in love,”

Just as the first three chapters of this Book teach how God qualified us to be “saints” by giving us a righteous standing in Christ, the following context begins to describe the process we must take if we are to become competent to perform His “calling” (Eph. 1:1). The first quality required in our lives to accomplish this heavenly job is “humility” (ταπεινοφροσύνης). This virtue is described by two words meaning *lowliness* and *mind*. It expresses the idea we need to maintain a *humble mindset* in our relationships with other believers in order to establish a basis for productive interaction. The opposite of “humility” is pride, haughtiness and arrogance, which tend to alienate or control others rather than encourage working together. The adjective “all” further emphasizes our need for *as much humility as possible* to counter this pride, a natural side effect of our old nature.

Second, “gentleness” (πραυτης) is mentioned as an essential ingredient toward properly living for the Lord. This word speaks of how we are to be *mild* in our dealings with one another, to be *soft* instead of rough or harsh. The adjective “all”, which also modifies this word, indicates it is important for us to maintain a gentle tone in our human relations *to the greatest possible degree*. Next, we are told a lifestyle worthy of the Lord will include “longsuffering” (μακροθυμιας). This noun combines two words which mean *long* and *passion* indicating *it should take a long time for us to become negatively passionate*. Often, this word is translated “*patience*”. Real life presents countless circumstances which aggravate our flesh, but believers are to allow this fruit of the Spirit to prevail instead (Gal. 5:22).

Lastly, we are encouraged to be “holding up one another in love”. The two words combined to form this participle literally mean “holding up” (ανεχομενοι) and indicate we should be *encouraging* one another. Since this word occurs in the *present tense*, highlighted by the word “while”, it specifies this action should *characterize* our daily lives. As Christians exercise *mutual support for one another*, which is one way of expressing “love”, a cooperative relationship is cultivated helping us accomplish God’s “calling”. Sometimes this word is translated “*forbearance*” when it portrays the need to hold ourselves or others up *in the midst of negative circumstances* (1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Thess. 1:4). The overall idea conveyed is whether interactions with other people are positive or negative, we should always make a concerted effort to be as supportive as the prevailing circumstances allow.

3) “while striving to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace;”

After listing God-formulated qualities which help Christians in their spiritual walk, Paul focuses on the associated goal of “striving to keep the unity of the Spirit”. The basic meaning of the participle “striving” (σπουδαζοντες) is *to make haste* or *do something with speed*. So, we are *to be quick to make this action a priority in our lives*. Therefore, we should *endeavor* and *be diligent* to keep the Spirit’s unity. Since this word occurs in the *present tense*, it indicates believers are to *constantly make this effort* with “one another”. Also, its *active voice* stresses the responsibility we have to *vigorously pursue* unity with all believers.

According to this statement, we do not need to manufacture unity, we simply have to “keep the unity” God has already established. The infinitive translated “to keep” (τηρειν) means *to maintain*. After God saved us and gave us His Spirit along with written instructions, we now have everything we need to conduct a lifestyle which demonstrates the unity He has provided for the Body (1 Cor. 12:13, 21-25; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18). However, we are fleshly beings in need of putting off our sinful thoughts and actions, and replacing them with His divine character (Eph. 4:22-24). Some of the specific attributes required have already been mentioned in verse 2. Only when believers are clothed with these Spirit-produced virtues can we gain the personality needed to achieve *genuine togetherness*.

Another prerequisite for maintaining Church unity is found within the phrase “in the bond of peace”. “Peace” (ειρηνης) is a *tranquil state*, the *lack of friction*. If this quality controls us, unity will emerge from the theoretical realm to become a reality in our relationships. Along with this “peace”, Paul adds the phrase “in the bond”, which means *in the realm of that which binds together*. When believers are driven by the binding power of peace, they can transcend flesh-engendered conflict and experience the tranquil friendship described here (Gal. 5:22; Col. 3:15).

4) “there is one body and one Spirit, according as you were also called in one hope of your calling;”

Having encouraged the Ephesian believers to preserve spiritual concord as one of the building blocks necessary to fulfill our “calling”, Paul now presents *seven ones* in the next three verses which *God has provided as foundational certainties so this unity can become an enduring reality*. The word translated “unity” (ενοτητα) in verse 3, actually means *oneness*, and it is from the same Greek root as the seven words translated “one” in verses 4-6.

The first unity-supporting-one recorded is “one body”. Paul is referring to the Church, the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24). This is the *spiritual organism* into which God has placed all those whom He has chosen and gifted (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12; Col. 3:15). For, Scripture says, “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body according as He willed” (1 Cor. 12:18). Chapter twelve of First

Corinthians graphically teaches if we demean the value of any member in the Body, we are rejecting God's purpose for which He saved them. Furthermore, God has given us the practice of the Lord's table in part to celebrate this divinely crafted indivisibility which we are to treasure in our communion as members of one another (1 Cor. 10:16-17).¹

Therefore, as members of the Body, we should be "striving to keep the unity of the Spirit". Anyone who endorses the idea their church, group or organization is better than others is not encouraging Spirit-prompted unity but instead is practicing *Sectarianism*. In New Testament assemblies, all believers in every town, to the far reaches of the gospel, are unconditionally associated with God's one Church, the Body of Christ. When Christians support thoughts or practices which cause division among themselves, this action is not in keeping with the Word-standards of *Acceptance*, *Tolerance* and *Building Up* (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8 – 10; Eph. 4:2-3).

"One Spirit" is the second unity-supporting-one listed. Paul's clear reference is to *the Holy Spirit*. He is the one who initially activates us to recognize God as our Father at the time we are saved (Rom. 8:15-16; Gal 4:6-9). He is also the divine force behind making us members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). After we are saved, He is the one who enables us to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:12). In conjunction with this knowledge, He is the one who empowers us to implement these truths into our lives (Gal. 5:16-25). *Spirituality* is the end product of conducting our Christian walk under the control and leading of God's Spirit (Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 5:18).

Believers can be confident our actions are guided by the Spirit when we are able to cite biblical teachings which precisely describe the changes observed in our character. One proof we are led by the power of the "one Spirit" is apparent when the attributes mentioned in verse 2, direct us to sustain unity with all believers. When this spiritual development comes about, it automatically results in Christians, together, carrying out the ministry to which we were "called".

Our "one hope" is the third unity-supporting-one stated. The *genitive case* which connects this "one hope" with our "calling" indicates this "hope" is *associated with* our *heavenly occupation*, which was covered in verse 1. This "hope" is a result of Christ being in us. Through Him, it is our present link with future glory, and we are not able to be moved from this secure position (Col. 1:23, 27). Titus 2:13 is one of

¹ Immediately before the main passage detailing the Lord's table, Paul addresses special circumstances regarding divisions in the Body which are approved by God (1 Cor. 11:18-19). However, we need to fully make sure anyone excluded from fellowship is truly causing moral or doctrinal corruption in the Church (1 Cor. 5:6-11; Titus 3:10-11).

the most dynamic verses referencing this “one hope” believers enjoy. It speaks about those “who expect the blessed hope and appearance of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”.

The word “hope” (ἐλπίδι) is not used to indicate we are unsure about our future glorification. Rather, it speaks of *the confident assurance* we have when *by faith we accept what God says* about our conformity to the image of Jesus Christ at His coming (Rom. 8:24-25, 28-30; Heb. 11:1). Our “hope” could be described as an *anticipation of the positive experience we will have* after transitioning from this life. When we visualize the destination affiliated with this eternal “hope” all believers share, it should produce a sense of togetherness in our daily relations within God’s family (Eph. 1:18; Heb. 10:23). In contrast with our present confidence in the future, unbelievers who lack biblical absolutes are uncertain about the afterlife (Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:13).

5) “one Lord, one faith, one baptism;”

Our “one Lord” is the next unity-supporting-one God has provided. This “Lord” is none other than *Jesus Christ*. The word “Lord” (κύριος) means *master* or *owner*. Just as slaves in Roman society had earthly masters, in the same way, we have been bought with the price of Jesus’ precious blood; and because of this celestial transaction, we are called His *servants* (Rom. 6:16-22; 1 Cor. 6:20; Eph. 6:5-9). All believers have the *same “Lord”* who desires us to follow the *same set of directions*. If we want to comply with our Lord’s wishes we will seek to receive all believers with pure motives and do what we can to eliminate interpersonal stumbling blocks. We will seek to build up others in the Body knowing our every action will come under the scrutiny of our Lord (Rom. 14:1-23). When Christ is allowed to be “Lord” in our lives, we can truly act in a manner pleasing to Him (Col. 2:6). So, His Lordship position over us is a significant factor helping to unify the Church in order that we together can carry on the work He assigned for us. Our mutual submission to His will also forms the foundation for an un-hypocritical testimony to non-Christians (Titus 2:5, 8, 10; 1 Pet. 2:11-12, 3:15-16).

The fifth unity-supporting-one presented is one “faith” (πίστις). This cannot refer to our personal faith, as the word is often used, because our human faith is imperfect and jaded. Since Paul is talking about things which prepare believers for ministry, this “faith” must refer to *the body of truth* toward which our faith is directed (Gal. 3:22-26; Col. 2:7). This “faith” is found in the “mystery” truth contained in “the administration of God which is in faith” (Eph. 3:2-3, 4:13; 1 Tim. 1:4, 3:9). Basic to this word is the concept of *trust*. When we recognize God’s Grace is the basis of our trust and believe the divine philosophy contained within it, the Holy Spirit can validate it as truth in our minds as well as give us power to obey it. This “one faith” *is the only physical entity present in this world which encompasses God’s*

recorded will. It also provides unlimited unity-causing direction so the Body of Christ, the Church, can properly conduct its spiritual job.

“One baptism” is the sixth unity-supporting-one noted. The word “baptism” (βαπτισμα) is consistently used to describe a *state resulting from the interaction of two or more things*.² In First Corinthians 12:13, the *effective result* of His Holy Spirit acting upon us is “we were baptized into one body” – we *assumed the state of being members of the Body of Christ*. In order to be qualified as God’s children, we must be fully acceptable to Him. So, Romans 6:3-4, explains how this was made possible when we were “baptized into Christ Jesus” and “buried with Him through baptism into death”. This passage teaches how the Holy Spirit *identified us with Christ’s death on the cross in such a real way* that it resulted in us *possessing a righteous standing before God and becoming morally alive* (Rom. 6:5-11; 8:15-16). Another outcome of our baptism “into Christ” is described by the phrase, we “have put on Christ”. This means God sees us fully clothed with the living qualities of Christ in our *newly acquired position* (Rom. 13:12-14; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12). In summary, the “one baptism” which applies to the Church involves our *spiritual association* with Jesus Christ’s death, burial and resurrection; with His Body; and with His holy character.

Since believers have experienced this *effectual identification* with Christ, we possess an actual source from which we can maintain unity with one another. This is possible not only because we are spiritually alive in Christ, but also as a result of the indwelling Holy Spirit who empowers us to make unity-producing choices. When we walk in the Spirit, we can “put to death” sinful actions and facilitate spiritual “fruits” enabling our bodies to accomplish relational oneness (Rom. 6:12-23; Gal. 6:16-26; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 3:5-17). Christians who take advantage of this *baptismal transformation* add one more piece to their character-repertoire, which helps them “keep the unity of the Spirit”. When we do not use the Spirit’s power, either because of ignorance or disobedience, we default into being governed by our flesh with the consequence of division causing actions.

² Examples confirming this meaning for “βαπτισμα” – **New Testament:** Jesus’ interaction with the cross resulted in His death (Mark 10:38-39); Israel’s contact with God’s miraculous power, which caused the red sea to part through Moses, prompted them to cling to him as their leader (1 Cor. 10:2); Jews who would not accept John the Baptist’s proclamation of the coming Messiah will suffer the baptismal “fire” of judgment (Matt. 3:11-12); As a type of baptism, Noah and his family were protected in the Ark from perishing through the flood (1 Pet. 3:20-22); Various baptisms (cleansings) under the Law atoned for the sins of Israel (Heb. 6:2, 9:10); and Kingdom believers who were water baptized in conjunction with repentance obtain forgiveness of sin and resultant signs (Mark 1:4; 16:16; Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38; 19:1-6; 22:16). **Septuagint:** Isaiah, in a vision, comes to a state of being “overwhelmed” (baptized) as he faces his transgression (Isa. 21:4). When Naiman dipped himself seven times in the Jordan River, he was cleansed (baptized) from his leprosy (4 Kings 5:14).

6) “one God and Father of all, who is upon all and through all and in all.”

“One God” is the final unity-supporting-one mentioned. In New Testament times, a major contributing factor to disunity among believers was the hostility existing between Jews and Gentiles. Since Israel was God’s chosen people during the administration of the Law, how could *unclean Gentiles* now have the same God and be equal with Jews before Him? Paul alludes to this issue when he writes; God is the “Father of all”. This same matter is addressed in Romans where it states there is “one God” who is equally the God of Jews or Gentiles and justifies both of them by faith (Rom. 3:29-30; 10:12-13). This same “one God” desires “*all men* to be saved and come to a full knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4-5).

When God saves men He intends for all fleshly distinctions to be discarded and replaced with the commonality we have around Him as our Father and the Savior, Jesus Christ. We need to incorporate the mindset prompted by our “one baptism” into Christ which is illustrated by the phrase “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:27-28). Recognizing all believers have the same God, who permeates our being as He is “upon all and through all and in all”, is another foundational factor for harmony. When Body members are controlled by this equality, unity can and will result. Then, we can be prompted from Spirit-central to engage in the work for which He “called us” (Gal. 5:18; Eph. 5:18).

Having briefly considered the seven unity-producing-realities God has furnished, why is there still so much division in the Body of Christ? This discord is a *byproduct of not adequately applying these foundational truths upon which unity is built*. The Church, which the Bible defines as “one body”, is too often replaced by organizations, churches, denominations and movements built by men. The Body’s “one hope” is sometimes mitigated to a belief that certain Christians look forward to a superior place in glory. This view is based on a perception they practice a purer form of Christianity. The “one faith” given by God and recorded in His Word is habitually replaced by doctrinal statements or writings of men. We should always be aware that anything compiled by saved members of the human race will be far inferior when compared with Scripture and is not energized by the Spirit.

The convicting role of the “one spirit” can easily be usurped by men who wish to control believers, greatly minimizing the possibility for these Body members to be individually led by the Holy Spirit. In this same regard, when the intended master-position of our “one Lord” is taken over by any leader, God’s children are discouraged from developing a direct connection with their Head. To be effective for the Lord, each believer needs to personally give Jesus Christ His rightful “first place” in his or her life (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:18; 1 Pet. 5:3).

The “one baptism” described by Paul is mostly misunderstood and commonly taught to refer to a water ceremony. As a result, what this spiritual “one baptism” has already accomplished in the lives of believers is seldom drawn upon to enhance “holiness” in their walk (Rom. 6:3-4, 19, 22). Finally, when unifying truth about the “one God . . . of all” is ignored, men place value on worldly distinctions rather than the team spirit all should share in Christ. Thus, a vital component is omitted which we need to perform the “calling” for which He “called” us (Eph. 4:1).

However, when Christians integrate these unity-producing influences, a climate of harmony is created between individual members and bodies of believers. For, in the first six verses of this chapter, God presents us with a *formula for unity*, which automatically doubles as an *antidote for division*. Each of us will be held personally accountable not only for proclaiming unity, but also for *acting in such a manner which maintains the foundation God has established for successfully working together*. When our works are examined by our Judge, Jesus Christ, *only what we actually do on earth will matter*. Rewards or suffering loss will not be based on what we know or believe (Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).

7) “And, to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”

After laying a foundation for how Christians can work together to carry out our ministry “calling”, Paul introduces the next component which God provides to help us accomplish this task. Coupled with our salvation, each believer “was given” a type of “grace . . . according to the measure of the gift of Christ”. “Grace” (χάρις) means *unmerited favor* which indicates *we do nothing to earn or deserve* what has been given to us. “Grace” most often describes a God-given factor used in our salvation as seen earlier in this Book (Eph. 1:7, 2:5, 8). However, the application of “grace” Paul introduces here extends beyond salvation and was given to each one of us so we can aid the Body of Christ.

The added phrase “according to the measure of the gift of Christ” means this “grace” given to every believer is *associated with* (genitive case) “the gift” which, in turn, is *associated with* “Christ”. The basic idea the word “gift” (δωρεας) expresses is *free*; it is like a *present*. The concept Paul is developing about what equips Body members to minister is founded in *an unmerited present given to each believer by Jesus Christ* (Eph. 4:10).³ He then says this “gift” has been allocated according to a “measure” (μετρον) or an *amount* (Rom. 12:3-7). This means every believer not only possesses a *gift* but also a divinely determined *quantity of their gift*, enabling them to become *a resource which contributes* to the growth of His Body.

³ For a discussion with regard to how Paul uses the word “gift” (δωρεα) in comparison to the other word he commonly uses to designate “gifts” (χαρισματα), see Appendix I.

Now, consider the phrase “to each one of us”, which indicates *every single believer possesses an unmerited gift*. Word order in the Greek language is significant, and in this verse the term “one” (εἷς) occurs in first position. Commonly a word is placed at the forefront to *emphasize that particular element* of a sentence. By use of this literary technique, the word “one” *places primary focus upon each believer’s gift as an additional oneness-factor* which works together with the *seven ones* already discussed in verses 4-6. With these combined elements, necessary unity can be attained for the Church to fulfill its “calling”.

God created these gifts, relative to service, into our personality (Rom. 9:20-23; 1 Cor. 12:18). Nevertheless, these natural abilities must function under control of the Holy Spirit to become a constructive force in accomplishing His purpose for the Church (Eph. 5:18). When we habitually exercise our gifts in conjunction with motives driven by Spirit-engendered love, they can flourish causing a positive impact on the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:4-7; 8:1, 9-13; 12:15-26; 13:1-7; 14:26; Gal. 5:16-26). However, to insure the proper use of spiritual gifts, God has provided an extensive example in First Corinthians concerning how their inappropriate use can derail the Body-building intent for which they were given.

One final point is noteworthy; Paul’s use of the word “gift” (δωρεας) in its *singular form* does not mean each believer has only one gift. But, just as Paul possessed numerous gifts for his ministry, all believers have *received a package of “differing” gifts, in varied “measure”, which God crafted for each of His children* (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-6, 14:18; Eph. 3:7, 4:1, 7).

8) “Wherefore it says, ‘Having ascended unto the height, he led captive captivity, he gave gifts to men.’ ”

In regard to Christians receiving a “measure of the gift of Christ”, the Holy Spirit chose to have Paul illustrate the process of how this took place by referencing Psalm 68:18. Based on the principles applied from this quote in the next couple of verses, it appears this passage was selected to help believing Jews in Ephesus better relate to concepts associated with a beneficial outcome of receiving divine gifts.⁴ Furthermore, because of earlier teachings in this Book about equality between Jews and Gentiles in the Body, they would have understood these gifts were given to all believers (Eph. 2:11 – 3:6). Before considering Paul’s breakdown

⁴ In his earlier Letters, Paul commonly quotes Old Testament passages which contain likenesses to the truths he teaches when Jewish believers make up part of an assembly (1 Cor. 2:9, 16; 2 Cor. 6:2; 8:15; Eph. 5:14). Other than three quotes in Ephesians and one in First Timothy 5:18, instruction by use of Old Testament passages is noticeably absent in his last seven Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, First & Second Timothy, and Titus).

of this passage, let us first look at God's original intent surrounding David's purpose for writing it to the Nation of Israel.

To begin with, this verse states how God ascended to "the height", His *high place*, which is likened to both the "hill of Bashan" and Mount "Sinai". Sinai was the *highland* from which God originally gave the Law to and bestowed associated blessings upon His people (Psalm 68:7-11, 15, 17, 26-35). Also, "the hill which God desireth to dwell in . . . forever", is mentioned as a future place He will occupy after victory over His enemies. This high place centers in *Jerusalem*, Mount Zion, the location from which Israel's coming King will rule over them in the promised Kingdom (Psalm 68:16, 29; see also 68:7, 9, 22, 27-29; 2 Kings 19:31; Isa. 10:12, 32). In addition, God is twice referred to as one who "rideth upon the heavens", the *lofty place* from which His power and blessings flow (vv. 4, 33).

Next, the Psalmist makes reference to how God's people are "those which are bound with chains" and are in "the depths of the sea", that is, they are held "captive" by their enemies (Psalm 68:6, 22; Eph. 4:8). Then he proceeds to explain how God will lead them from their humble "captivity" by *benevolently taking them captive* and bringing them back to the Promised Land where they will receive boundless riches and blessing (vv. 9-13, 29-35; Eph. 4:8). When Israel receives this "salvation", God's enemies will "be scattered", "flee", "perish", and be caused to "submit" because of their "trespasses" (vv. 1-2, 19-21, 30). Also, at this time, "spoil" gained from the conquest will be given to God's Nation as an eternal reward. This is described by the phrase, "he gave gifts to men" (vv. 12-13, 19-20, and 28-35).⁵

Before moving on to Paul's application of principles conveyed by this quotation, it should be noted the noun "gifts" (δοματα) in verse 8, is directly linked to the noun "gift" (δωρεας) in verse 7, since both are derived from the same Greek root found in the verb "διδωμι", meaning *to give*. This verb is also used in both verses to introduce these two nouns, being rendered "was given" and "gave" respectively. This connection indicates the subject matter of *spiritual gifts* introduced in verse 7, turns to a Psalm analogy in verse 8. Then, principles from this Old Testament reference are tied to Jesus Christ giving gifts to the Church in verses 9 through 11.

9) "And, the word 'He ascended', what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?"

Paul's examination of Psalm 68:18 begins with a discussion about the word "He ascended" (ανεβη). This verb means *to go up* and is commonly used for *climbing in elevation*, often in regard to ascending to the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 20:17-18;

⁵ For further information with regard to how Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:7; see Appendix II.

John 11:55; Acts 11:2, 25:1; Gal. 2:1-2). Although Jerusalem has no direct physical relationship with the Body of Christ, Paul does employ it in an allegorical sense to represent how we as the people of God are in a heavenly position free from bondage related to the Law (Gal. 4:25 – 5:1; see also Heb. 11:22). Just as Christ will ascend to rule Israel from Jerusalem in the Kingdom, the concept of our Lord ascending to a *high position* in relation to the Church is the *first point of application Paul draws from this Psalm*.

Having mentioned Christ's ascension, Paul now asks, "What is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of this verse because the word "lower" (κατωτερα) is only used here in the New Testament. This *adjective* describes the noun "parts" and, since it occurs in the *comparative form*, it means *lower when compared with something higher*. The verb translated "He descended" (κατεβη) means *to go down* and it is the direct opposite of the verb "He ascended".

So where did Christ descend when He went "into the lower parts of the earth"? Three common interpretations have some merit since they are based on concepts contained in other Scriptures which may explain what Paul is discussing here. One position is Jesus Christ came to this sin-burdened earth, a *lowly place among lowly men*. He humbled Himself to the degree of taking on the form of a man and dying a terrible cross-death (Psalm 8:5; Phil. 2:5-11). Second, some claim this statement refers to the *burial of our Lord in an earthly tomb* (Luke 23:53-56; 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Finally, some interpret this as a corollary passage to when Jesus "preached to the spirits in prison" – those who died in the flood and are awaiting judgment (1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6). Although this comparison is made, there is no direct proof Peter's reference is connected with Ephesians 4:9.

Each theory contains some speculation. However, it is interesting that all three positions dovetail around Jesus Christ's course of life, culminating in His payment for the sin of mankind. Even though Paul does not directly expound on the word "captivity" found in Psalm 68:18, he may be referencing that part of the quote to illustrate Christ *rescuing us from the helpless and hopeless position we held as unbelievers, separated from God* (Rom. 7:23; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 1:13-14). His ascension into heaven, which followed His death and resurrection, enabled Him to offer His untarnished blood to God and obtain an "eternal inheritance" for us (Heb. 9:11-15). Just as God will rescue Israel from "captivity" and lead them to the Promised Land as described in Psalm 68, the fact Jesus Christ *rescued us from our captivity to sin so we can become His people may be implied as the next application Paul draws from this Old Testament quote*.⁶

⁶ Some of my thoughts on verses 8-10 were augmented by comments on Psalm 68:18 from John Calvin's Commentary, J. N. Darby's Bible Synopsis, and Barne's Notes on the Bible.

10) “The one having descended, He Himself is also the one having ascended far above all the heavens, in order that He might fill all things.”

Since the meaning of Christ *descending* has already been discussed, let us move forward and consider the phrase, “He . . . ascended far above all the heavens”. The word rendered “far above” (υπερανω) consists of two prepositions meaning *above* and *up*. It conveys the idea of being *above what is on top*. This word is used in Ephesians 1:20-21 referring to the position Christ occupies as He sits at God’s “right hand in the heavens *far above* all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name being named . . .” This is our Lord’s *lofty vantage point* from which He exercises His Headship “over all things in relation to the Church, which is . . . the fullness” of God (vv. 22-23).

In regard to Jesus Christ’s ascension, Paul says it was far above “all the heavens”. From Scripture, we learn at least three levels of “heaven” exist, the third of which is *the place where God resides* (2 Cor. 12:2). The first “heaven” appears to be our *atmosphere* where birds fly, and the second is *space* where stars and planets are seen (2 Sam. 21:10; Job 22:12; 1 Cor. 15:40-41). In reference to Christ ascending to offer “His own blood” to God, the Book of Hebrews teaches about our “great high priest *having passed through the heavens* (emphasis is mine), Jesus the Son of God” (4:14). His single sacrifice offered “once for all” mankind’s sin accomplished “eternal redemption”. For this reason, the Father rewarded Jesus with a seat at His right hand (9:11-15; Rom. 8:34).

Our Lord is worthy to hold this *highly exalted position* since He brought glory to God through a faultless journey which began at His birth into this world and concluded with His ascension into heaven. God’s *purpose* for His Son ascending to this *height* is “in order that He might fill (πληρωση) all things” (Eph. 4:10). What Paul means by “all things” is clarified by the surrounding context which centers on *gifts He has given to the Body* (vv. 7-11). As these imparted gifts are exercised by believers who obey the command to “be filled (πληρουσθε) with the Spirit”, real potential exists for the Body of Christ to graduate from its granted *position* of being the “fullness” (πληρωμα) of God and move toward *its goal of emulating character* which mirrors “the fullness (πληρωματος) of Christ” (Eph. 1:22-23; 3:19; 4:13; 5:18). Under *Spirit-guided control*, our gifts can effect changes beyond imagination both in our character and interactions with fellow Body members (3:20-21).

Just as Israel of old will benefit by God bestowing upon them the “spoil” gained from victory over their enemies, in a similar fashion, *members of the Body benefit from Jesus Christ giving us gifts* from the high position to which He was exalted. This appears to be the *final point of application for the Church* which Paul garners from this Psalm (68:12, 18).

11) “And, on the one hand, He Himself gave apostles, also prophets, also evangelists, also pastors and teachers”

Now, Paul lists some of the specific gifts given to the Church. The terms “apostles”, “prophets”, “evangelists”, “pastors” and “teachers” all occur in the *accusative case* which means they are the *direct objects* of the verb “gave”. This grammatical relationship indicates He *gave these members as gifted ones*, so these gifts are directly connected with our created being. We did not receive them after becoming members of the Body.

“On the one hand” (μεν) He gave “apostles”. This *conjunctive particle* is used to *distinguish the word it occurs with from those which follow*. It is commonly used in association with the *conjunction* “δε” to create a list of things as is the case here. The conjunction “δε” is translated “also” three times in this verse separating “apostles” from the “prophets”, “prophets” from the “evangelists” and “evangelists” from the “pastors and teachers”. The following grammatical evidence shows there are four separate gifts spoken about here, not five as is sometimes taught.

First, the conjunction connecting “pastors and teachers” is “καί”. It simply refers to a *connection between two things*. The other conjunction translated “also” (δε) not only indicates a *connection between two things* but it also emphasizes *there is something different when the connected words or phrases are compared*. Often both of these conjunctions are translated “and”, but I have rendered them in a manner which accentuates their core meanings. Second, evidence the “pastors and teachers” are connected as one gift is shown by the fact these two nouns share the *definite article* “τους”. This article appears a total of four times in verse 11, which signifies there are four separate gifts listed. The other three occurrences of “τους” are coupled with each of the first three gifts listed.

“Apostles” (τους . . . αποστολους) are the first gifted ones cited who Jesus Christ gave to the Church. This word literally means *ones sent from*, and thus, ones *dispatched*. They were sent forth *to establish a message*, and Paul was the central one Jesus Christ chose to deliver His message of God’s Grace to the Body of Christ (Gal. 1:1 – 2:10, note 1:1 and 2:8; Titus 1:1-3). A number of other “apostles” are mentioned in the Book of Acts and Epistles who worked in association with Paul so the “administration of the grace of God” would gain a *foundation* throughout the far reaches of the inhabited world (Eph. 2:20; 3:2-5; Col. 1:23).

“Prophets” (τους . . . προφητας) are recorded second as gifted individuals given for distribution of the gospel. This noun consists of two words which literally mean *speech beforehand*. As used in the Bible, a prophet is one who transmitted an original message received from God to those for whom it was intended. The

content of a prophet's message could include historical truths, present events and future realities. Before the message our Lord delivered to the Church was written down, prophets were the channel through whom God's Word was brought to Christians (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 14:1, 29-33). Many of those designated as "prophets", including Paul, were also gifted "apostles". The purpose of both "apostles" and "prophets" was *to institute the groundwork needed to launch the gospel*. Then, both of these gifts ceased after the message had been adequately received from Jesus Christ, recorded, and circulated throughout the Church (1 Cor. 3:10-12, 13:8-13; Eph. 2:20). These are two of the gifts God "rendered inoperative" (καταργεω)⁷ when His need for them became obsolete.

The third group of persons mentioned as gifts given to the Church are "evangelists" (τους . . . ευαγγελιστας). This is also a two part word meaning *announcers of good*. It is built on the same root as the noun "gospel" (ευαγγελιον), so evangelists are *those who proclaim the good news* of the gospel message. Evangelists replaced the "apostles" since the need to receive and establish revelation of truth had been completed. Certainly "evangelists" are to personally carry the gospel to those who are in unbelief and headed toward eternal condemnation. However, the emphasis of this passage focusses on how these individuals were given to the Body "toward the preparation of the saints" (v. 12).

So, the primary reason evangelists are mentioned here is in regard to their *job of training other believers* in the art of sharing the gospel. The eternal truths of Scripture never change. Nevertheless, because biblical realities must be related to the lost in light of prevailing societal views, constantly changing philosophies and varying beliefs among people in different geographic locations, Christians need *continuing education* so we can evangelize our generation. Gifted evangelists insure each Body member can know how to effectively urge all people, with whom we come in contact, to believe the salvation message (1 Cor. 2:1-5; Col. 4:5-6).

Finally, "pastors and teachers" (τους . . . ποιμενας και διδασκαλους) were given to the Church. "Pastors" (ποιμενας) are *those who shepherd a flock of sheep*. The noun form of this word occurs only here in the New Testament. However, an action form is used in two other passages which indicate Church elders are to be involved in *shepherding the flock of God* (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). It is necessary for those who fill a pastoring roll as trainers in the Body of Christ to also be "teachers" (διδασκαλους). This noun describes *those who can instruct* believers with Scriptural truth based on a time-tested knowledge of the Word. In addition, this biblical understanding must be combined with godly character – a lifestyle *worthy of*

⁷ This compound word comes from three Greek words meaning *down* (κατα), *not* (α), and *to work* (εργαζομαι). It occurs four times in First Corinthians 13:8-11, carrying the idea of *idling down to a non-working state*.

respect – in order to have a lasting, positive impact on the Church (Phil. 3:17; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5).

In the same way as evangelists replaced the apostles, prophets were replaced by the *pastor/teachers*. Paul and other prophets orally received truth from God for the purpose of delivering it to the Church. Subsequently, they wrote it down and it became our permanent record of Scripture (1 Cor. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:18). Now, pastor/teachers, who replaced these prophets, study this record and help members of the Body comprehend it (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:9; 2 Peter 2:1).

In contexts where “pastors and teachers” are discussed, they are consistently represented as *a plurality of gifted members* provided to train the Body and are *never spoken about in terms of being one individual*, even when a gathering of believers was few in number (Acts 12:1, 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). Also, these gifted ones are *never designated by a position* held in the Church. Furthermore, they are *never called Reverend* or given *celebrity status*. In contrast, they are regularly portrayed as *self-supporting servants* (Acts 20:32-35; 1 Cor. 9:6-18; Phil. 4:18; 1 Thess. 2:6; 2 Thess. 3:7-10). Pastor/teachers are simply presented as one of the cogs in God’s spiritual machine, the Body of Christ, specifically to educate the other members so all can participate in the “work of ministry” (Eph. 4:12). God did not intend for them to be perceived as more important than other members who faithfully contribute to the Body through the exercise of their gifts (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 12:24-25). Actually, the Word never gives the idea any one gifted individual should be primary or dominant in any assembly; that designation is reserved for *Jesus Christ, alone* (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 1:18, 2:19; Heb. 4:14; 1 Peter 5:4).

This list is not intended to represent a complete record of all gifts which endure during this administration of Grace. These gifted individuals are simply involved in *preparing Christians for the work of ministry*, which is clarified by the upcoming context. Additional gifts mentioned in the Epistles, excluding ones having passed off the scene, are designed to serve the Body in order to fulfill every other need.

12) “toward the preparation of the saints, for the work of ministry, resulting in the building up of the body of Christ,”

The reason Jesus Christ gave gifted members to mentor the Body with Christian norms is “toward the preparation of the saints”. The *preposition* translated “toward” (προς) *directs* these Church trainers *to the goal* which they are to pursue. Their purpose is to follow a course which will accomplish the “preparation” (καταρτισμὸν) of all the other believers so they will be competent to do the “work of ministry” (2 Tim. 2:2). This word is derived from a noun which transliterates into the English word *artisan* (αρτισις) prefixed by “κατα”, indicating *repetition*. Their combined meaning is to *perfect something*, often by *restoration*. This noun occurs only here

in the New Testament, however, its action form is used for the *restoration* of fishing nets, unity among believers and Christians who are contemplating sin (Matt. 4:21; 1 Cor. 1:10; Gal. 6:1). It is also used to describe the *preparation* of a disciple, Jesus' earthly body and the ages during creation (Luke 6:40; Heb. 10:5; 11:3). As this word applies to believers, we need to be *re-crafted with godly knowledge and character to be prepared or equipped* for ministry (2 Tim. 3:17).

When people are first saved, our ultimate destination to be with the Lord forever is based solely on the positional righteousness we have in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). Then, *spiritual restoration* must begin, which will prepare us to serve the Lord during this lifetime. For this process, “pastors and teachers” were given as *trainers* to equip us “for the work of ministry”. The noun translated “ministry” (διακονιας) is a very interesting word built from the noun “κονια”, meaning *dust*, and the preposition “δια”, which means *through*. This word describes a person involved in *busy-ness* of any kind, whose activity is illustrated by *kicking up dust throughout* the process of purposeful movement. For believers, this *spiritual business* consists of *promoting the truths of the gospel* through the conduit of *transformed lives empowered by the Spirit*.

“Διακονια” is the primary label found in the Epistles to define Christian “ministry” (Rom. 12:7; 2 Cor. 3:7-9; 5:18).⁸ Since this context connects every believer to this “ministry”, *the indication is all Christians are in The Ministry*. The importance of this truth bears repeating. *Every single believer is to be involved in ministry, not just those who have a pastoral gift*. God's intent for all His children is for each of us to progress toward spiritual maturity, leaving behind our flesh-controlled infancy, in order for us to be effective for Him. *All Christians can and should grow to become good examples, competent to counsel, able to evangelize and teachers of one another – “the work” of ministry* (Rom. 15:14; Gal 6:1-2; Phil. 3:17; Col. 3:16-17).

As believers mature and spend more time carrying out ministry work; their efforts will cause “the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). The noun translated “building up” (οικοδομην) comes from two words which mean *the building of a house* and is often translated “edification”. The Body of Christ, the Church, is referenced by *this house analogy* both regarding a structure where God dwells and a place from which His truth is sustained (1 Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:19, 22; 1 Tim. 3:15). This verse teaches: *Optimal edification of the Church can only become a reality when all the saints are involved*. Every believer who comes to realize the important part he or she plays in God's divine production will be revitalized in regard to their personal service for the Lord as well as be able to encourage other members to exercise their Body-building gifts. As stated earlier, God placed gifted

⁸ Paul also commonly uses the related noun “διακονος” to designate himself and others as “ministers” of the gospel of Grace (Rom. 15:8; 2 Cor. 3:6; Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:7).

people in the Body according to His distinct purpose and in a manner which pleased Him. This verse teaches that each of these individuals was intended to become a structural block which can build up the Church.

13) “until we might all attain unto the unity associated with the faith and the full knowledge of the Son of God, resulting in a perfect man, resulting in the measure of the stature associated with the fullness of Christ,”

The *conjunction* rendered “until” (μέχρι) means *until the point* what is described in the preceding context is accomplished. Therefore, when those who possess training gifts help prepare members in the Body for the work of ministry, proliferating growth will result in the Church “until we might all attain” God’s high goal of “unity”. The verb translated “we might . . . attain” (καταντησωμεν) occurs in the *subjunctive mode* indicating this unity can only be achieved *when “all” believers do their part*. To properly train God’s army, Christian leaders must help members of the Body grasp this essential truth concerning each person’s responsibility and role within His plan (Eph. 6:1-18). These leaders will be held accountable for their job of teaching believers to fulfill our divinely prescribed duty both because they were gifted for this purpose and God’s goals for the Body cannot be met unless all Christians are involved (1 Cor. 1:10-15).

Back in verse 3, the subject of “unity” was introduced in conjunction with believer’s commonality around the Holy Spirit. In this verse, “unity” is “associated with” (genitive case) two interrelated things, “the faith” and “the full knowledge of the Son of God”. “The faith” is speaking about *the body of truth we believe*. It is used in the same way here as in verse 5 of this chapter. When believers are properly trained by evangelists and pastor/teachers in our comprehension and practice of the “faith”, we have the potential to attain Spirit produced “unity”.

In conjunction with this, Christians must also “attain” unity based on a “full knowledge of the Son of God”. The word “full knowledge” (ἐπιγνωσης) is constructed from the preposition “ἐπι”, meaning *upon*, and the noun “γνωσις”, which indicates *knowledge*. This word not only expresses the idea of “knowledge”, but it indicates we can acquire *knowledge on top of knowledge*. It is routinely used by Paul to represent the concept of *full or complete knowledge*. Specifically, this “full knowledge” speaks of the *complete understanding* of truth God has given to be followed by the Body of Christ, the Church (Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10; 2:2; Titus 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Furthermore, this “full knowledge” is *associated with* (genitive case) “the Son of God”. As believers progressively grasp the vast truths given for the Church revolving around the Person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, an effective foundation is

formed to “attain” a Spirit-centered “unity” in relation to the “faith”, which can then overflow into all phases of “ministry” (1 Cor. 3:10-12; Col. 1:28). Believers who do not work together toward this goal demonstrate they are deficient in regard to understanding biblical instruction as well as being led by the Spirit.

When Christians become more unified around the truths which explain our relationship to, extol the virtues of, and contain directions from our Savior, growth materializes in us “resulting in a perfect man”. The preposition “εἰς”, translated “resulting in”, means *in the direction of* and points toward the *destination of our pursuit* – a “perfect man”. The adjective rendered “perfect” (τελειον) most basically represents *the nature of being complete*. It is used to refer to the *perfect* or *complete* Word of God and the prophecy through which it was revealed (Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 13:10). It is also used metaphorically regarding Christian *maturity* and represents *the goal of perfection* we are to progress toward as we continue to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 2:6; Col. 1:28; Heb. 5:14).

Paul’s use of the phrase “perfect man” in this verse is related to the terms “new man” and “inner man” used in his other Letters (Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 2:15; 4:24). These designations represent our righteous standing before God and characterize the ability we now have to overcome sin by His indwelling Spirit. Subsequent to being placed in the Body, we are directed to “put on” this “new man” *by integrating the qualities of Christ into our mortal bodies* (Rom. 8:11; 13:12-14; Eph. 3:16; 4:24; Col. 3:9-11).

When believers undergo this spiritual transformation, we experience a reality “resulting in the measure of the stature associated with the fullness of Christ”. The noun “fullness” (πληρωματος) is similar in meaning to the word “perfect” (τελειον) used in the last phrase. Regarding Christ, this word is used to explain how God was pleased for “all the fullness to dwell” in Him, the One through whom He accomplished the reconciliation of mankind. It also speaks of “all the fullness of deity” which presently resides in our risen Lord (Col. 1:19; 2:9). Then, Colossians 2:10 expresses how we are absorbed into this same “fullness” when the *participial form* is used to express “we have been filled in Him”. Following this statement, Paul delineates a number of wonderful eternal realities which explain the *completeness* we possess in association with our Savior (vv. 11-15).

In this same vein, the Body of Christ, the Church, is spoken of as being the “fullness” of God since He presently sees us through the righteous filter of Christ, our Savior, Lord and Head (Eph. 1:22-23). Proceeding forward in the heavenly story of Ephesians, Paul prays that we might “be filled in the direction of all the fullness of God” as we learn to integrate the truths set forth in the first three chapters (3:19). This “fullness of (or associated with) Christ” consists of all the righteousness and holiness of God we see revealed in the image of our Savior.

Because of our position in Christ, His “fullness” can now become part of us when we cloth ourselves with the new man by submitting to His Spirit. In this way, we can exhibit the living-demonstration of His character we find detailed in His Word (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 3:27-28, 5:16-18; Eph. 5:18).

The same “measure” (μετρον), or *amount*, and “stature” (ηλικιας), or *size*, which is associated with the “fullness” found in Christ, is also available for believers. This speaks of *the incredible extent* we have at our disposal to be transformed into Jesus’ *perfect completeness*. As we gain insight into this celestial truth and learn to incorporate it by Spirit-renovating power, amazing change can happen in our lives “far beyond which things we can ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). Believers who take this path will mutually and successfully participate in the ministry-journey to which God invites each of us to partake.

14) “in order that we might no longer be infants, being wave tossed and carried around by every wind of teaching, in the gambling approach of men, in unscrupulousness, toward the method of deceit,”

Now that Paul has completed his description of how God’s spiritual organism, the Body of Christ, should function to carry out its mission, his focus turns to why this approach is all-important for Church members. Before discussing positive ramifications associated with the proper edification of believers (4:15-16), in this verse he explains what can happen if we fail to follow this pattern for growth. The conjunction translated “in order that” (ινα) introduces the *purpose* for which the Church is directed to activate God’s method of using gifted trainers to prepare believers for ministry (vv. 11-13). It is *for the purpose that* we might no longer continue as spiritual infants.

The word “infants” (νηπιοι) literally means *not speaking*, therefore it portrays ones who are *naïve* or *senseless*. The phrase “we . . . might be” (ωμεν) is translated from a *verb of being* and, as such, refers to the *essence of what we are*. Christians should not remain in this *vulnerable newborn state of existence*, for this immature condition leaves us open to treacheries brought on by the world which are described in the rest of this verse. This verb also occurs in the *subjunctive mode* indicating the *exercise of our choice* to follow God’s path for growth can help us avoid the dangers associated with spiritual youth. As Christians become *mature* in Christ, taking on the “fullness” of His character, we position ourselves to “no longer” be influenced by the pitfalls of this age (Eph. 2:1-3; 4:13; 6:10-18).

However, those who disregard this prescribed growth process will inevitably be “wave tossed and carried around by every wind of teaching.” The key word in this phrase is “teaching” (διδασκαλιας), which means *instruction*. The same word is used to define what Christians are commonly told to embrace, but our “teaching”

is to have its source in the truth revealed by God (Rom. 15:4; 1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:9). The “teaching” in this verse has its origin in the mind of men; it consists of every conceivable *human philosophy*. Paul heard this sort of “teaching” on Mars Hill in Athens. He consistently warns believers not to base our beliefs on these kinds of meager and fleeting thoughts (Acts 17:16-34; Col. 2:4-8). Since the word “teaching” is in the *genitive case*, translated by the word “of”, the indication is we will be “wave tossed and carried around by every wind” (illustrations of being negatively controlled) *as a result of an affiliation with faulty instruction*.

If we allow human thinking to form even part of the teaching we depend on to live the Christian life, it will *toss us around like waves*. The participle “wave tossed” (κλυδωνιζομενοι) occurs in the *present tense* meaning this teaching’s turbulent effect on our minds and hearts will be *continuous*. Also, when we are influenced by the philosophies of man, we put ourselves in a position of “being” metaphorically “carried around” (περιφερομενοι) by their instruction. This participle also occurs in the *present tense* which develops a picture of us being *constantly* driven by the “wind” of men’s counsel. Note, the adjective “every” (παντι) is *singular in number*, which points out *each individual* viewpoint originating from men can wreak havoc on our way of life. Since these two participles also occur in the *passive voice*, the indication is believers who submit to this kind of teaching are not in control of themselves. On the contrary, they are *propelled by an outside force*, relentlessly thrown about by the ideas of this world.

Three prepositional phrases⁹ are now used to warn us about the devastating influence human thinking has on Christians. First, we are to beware of “the gambling approach of men”. Our English word ‘cube’ is derived from the noun “gambling” (κυβεια). Just like cubes of dice are used to win a prize by random chance, in the same way, the world wants us *to take chances* in regard to how we navigate life. This “approach” is dangerous when compared with following God’s righteous standards recorded in Scripture, and it presents all sorts of moral hazards and dilemmas. The use of the preposition “in” (εν) with the noun “gambling” indicates if believers operate *in this* realm, it will embolden them to be morally out of control. In essence, this *adverbial phrase* specifies those who *act in this reckless manner* will be “wave tossed and carried around by every wind” of human philosophy.

The second prepositional phrase is “in unscrupulousness” (εν πανουργια). The noun in this phrase is built from two words meaning *all* and *working*. It represents an unbeliever’s approach to life as they are indiscriminately willing to try *all*

⁹ *Prepositional phrases* are made up of a preposition connected with one or more substantives (nouns, pronouns, participles, or infinitives). These constructions accomplish a more extensive *adverbial description* of the action word or words they modify than any adverb is capable of when used alone.

methods of behavior in order to accomplish an objective. Occurring with the preposition “ἐν”, the indication is men will function *in the realm* of employing any action to reach their goals. The end of this lifestyle promotes a lack of ethical standards which encourages philosophies such as: *The End Justifies The Means*. This kind of thinking simply assists a person to be “wave tossed and carried around by every wind of teaching”.

The third prepositional phrase indicates believers who take this secular path will be directed “toward the method of deceit”. The noun “method” (μεθοδεϊαν) is a transliteration of this Greek word which consists of the preposition “μετα”, meaning *across*, and the noun “οδος”, meaning *road*. It describes how immature Christians will be led *down a road* which is *associated with* “deceit” (πλανης – *genitive form*). The word “deceit” specifies *a wandering about* and basically means to be *led astray*. It is used to describe how the deceptive nature of sin arises from the evil, supernatural realm and directs a person away from God (1 Thess. 2:3; 2 Thess. 2:11; 1 John 4:6).

Contextually, the practices of “gambling” and “unscrupulousness” are used to entrap youthful believers “toward” (προς) or *to the destination* of these deceptive methods. The World, the Flesh, and the Devil employ any and all means in order to mislead believers, coupled with a wave-tossed and wind-blown atmosphere of moral confusion (Eph. 6:11; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 John 2:16). Let us rather disavow these teachings and follow the “faith” which revolves around the eternally stable and benevolent ways of our Savior, Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:5, 13).

15) “but, while actively practicing truth in love, let us increase all things unto Him who is the head, Christ,”

The conjunction “but” (δε) *connects* this verse with the former context. Also, it *marks a change in subject matter* indicating a departure from the perilous subject just discussed. Now, the focus is on how believers can use positive application of truth to accomplish the unified ministry outlined earlier in this chapter so we can benefit the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-13). The participle translated “while actively practicing truth” (αληθευοντες) is in the *present tense*, meaning this is to be done *continually*, represented by the words “while” and “practicing”. Since this term also occurs in the *active voice*, the word “actively” is used to emphasize this point of grammar. As believers *actively and constantly apply* the truth we have been given, we can advance spiritually toward “the measure of the stature associated with the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

In most Versions, “αληθευοντες” is rendered “speaking the truth”, which only partly transfers its intended meaning into English. In actuality, the concept of *speaking* is not specified by the meaning of this word. The fact is this participle is simply built

from the *verb stem* “αληθ-” which is also used to form the noun “truth” (αληθεια). Fortunately, the same present, active participial form of this word is used one other time in Galatians which provides a clearer picture of what it means (Gal. 4:16). In that passage, Paul asks the believers, “have I become your enemy while actively practicing truth (αληθευων)¹⁰ in relation to you?” The surrounding context clarifies he not only taught these believers pertinent facts about the gospel, he also modelled those truths in his actions. As a result, he gained so much respect they would have done almost anything for him, which included giving him their good eyes to replace his defective ones (Gal. 4:12-15). These two passages use this same participial form to cover how *putting truth into action should affect every aspect of our Christian lifestyle*. This standard of living is readily observed in Paul’s example of well-rounded ministry recorded in the Word, as well as in the lives of early Church leaders who imitated him (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9). Simply put: *Their motives, character and actions reflected what they taught*.

As believers seek to energetically practice truth, it is to be done “in love” (εν αγαπη). This prepositional phrase means we are to express truth within our lives *in a manner consistent with love*. Love is the most basic expression of God’s character. A broad definition of it is *any action which benefits others* (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Rom. 12:9-21). If we are being led by the Spirit, application of truth will be at the forefront of our conscience with the resolve to direct our mind, heart and deeds. When our Christian practice is controlled by a loving expression of truth, we will not be promoting ourselves, but Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:5). Thus, the next phrase reads, “let us increase all things unto Him”.

The verb “let us increase” (αυξησωμεν) refers to the *process of growth* believers are to undergo. Occurring in the *subjunctive mode*, it emphasizes *we need to take responsibility* to fully know and properly apply truth in a loving manner. This, in turn, will cause each member of the Body to *advance* spiritually. The *subjunctive mode* combined with the *aorist tense* means we are *exhorted* to pursue growth *until it is complete*, an objective which in reality no one can achieve. However, we should do our best to actively communicate truth in a manner which can be used by the Spirit to effect growth in every believer by guiding their focus “unto Him”. The preposition “unto” (εις) means *in the direction of* Jesus, who is our “head”. The motives and actions of every believer should be dedicated to how we will individually and corporately glorify our Savior (2 Cor. 4:5; Col. 1:18, 28). Not just some things in our lives are to be done for “Him”, but we do should direct the whole Body’s attention toward Him in “*all things*”.

¹⁰ The participle in Galatians 4:16 differs in its ending because it occurs in the nominative *singular* form, referring to Paul; whereas the one in Ephesians 4:15 is in the nominative *plural* form, referring to all believers. Other than this difference, the meaning of these participles is identical in both passages.

The Lord is described here as our “Head”. Applying the idea Headship to this context, we are to consciously serve Him as the Administrator from whose mind truth originates. Then, this teaching is to be universally expressed in our being which will help us grow in the direction of conformity with His Person (1 Cor. 2:16; Eph. 4:20-24). Added to being our “head”, Paul also calls Jesus the “Christ”, *the anointed one, the Messiah, God’s chosen Ruler* whose Grace is to occupy the place of *Rule* in our lives (see Paul’s use of “Christ” in the following passages: Rom. 5:17, 21; 6:8-12). In conjunction with this designation, “Christ” is also named as the one to whom we will all give an account of our actions (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10).

16) “out of whom the whole body, while being joined together and instructed together through the full supply of every joint, according to the working in the measure of each one part, produces the increase of the body resulting in the building up of itself in love.”

At first glance, this verse is very complicated. Therefore, it is beneficial to pinpoint the primary sentence around which the remaining parts of this verse revolve. This framework is: “the whole body . . . produces the increase of the body”. “The whole body” is the *subject*; “produces” is the *verb*; and “the increase” is the *direct object*. The phrase “of the body” (του σωματος) is in the *genitive case* indicating “the increase” the “body” produces is *associated with “the body” itself*. With this foundation, Paul concludes with the idea that activity within the Body of Christ results “in a building up of itself in love”. Grasping how the other phrases in this verse modify this skeletal sentence and how the truth of this verse relates to the extended context will help disclose how this “building up” takes place.

First, Paul says *the source* of this movement within the Body is “out of whom” (ἐξ ου), that is, *from our Head, Christ* (Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:19). This statement is an outgrowth of verse 5, where we are told there is “one Lord”. Every believer needs to nurture their connection with and recognize they are individually accountable to the Lord Jesus in order to make a positive impact on the Church. To the extent that each member of the Body utilizes this access to our Lord, “the whole body” will increasingly practice dependence on its Head for direction and power. This activity will ultimately enable the Body to cause “the building up of itself” (1 Cor. 3:21-23; 8:6; Col. 2:19). How this dynamic happens is expressed by the two participles which read, “while being joined together and instructed together”. Then, Paul further describes how this Body-life is created by the phrases, “through the full supply of every joint” and “according to the working in the measure of each one part”.

The first participle rendered “while being joined together” (συναρμολογουμενον) is a combination of the preposition “συν”, meaning *with*, affixed to the verbs “αρμοζω”,

to *join* (from which we get our English word ‘harmony’), and “λεγω”, to *speak*. The idea conveyed is when Body members *speak in joint harmony with one another*, while drawing upon power available through our Head, we further the preparation and maturation of the whole Body to carry out the Lord’s ministry (Eph. 4:12-13). Since this word is in the *present tense*, emphasized by the word “while”, we are to *continually* practice this constructive interaction. While persisting in this symphonic unity, *the Body will figuratively make beautiful music together* and proceed toward God’s purpose for the Church to become transformed into His “fullness”.

Next, the Body builds itself up “while being . . . instructed” (συμβιβάζομενον). This participle is made up of two words which mean *to put together*. It is used to describe Paul “proving” (*putting together*) from the Old Testament Scripture that Jesus is the Christ as well as him “concluding” (*putting together*) from a vision that God had called him to evangelize in Macedonia (Acts 9:22; 16:10). Then, he uses it two more times similar to this passage in reference to *instruction* (1 Cor. 2:16; Eph. 4:16; Col. 2:2). As believers are *effectively educated* in a manner which results in *putting together* or *understanding* the process necessary to be conformed to the image of Christ, the Body is placed in a position to build itself up in love. Also, this participle occurs in the *present tense* form which indicates this instruction is to be *ongoing*.

Furthermore, both participles just detailed were written in the *passive voice* which means *an action outside* the Body *causes* this joining together and instruction. Since the Church is made up of members, the next two phrases clarify “every joint” (each believer) is the root cause of this activity. To begin with, these things are stated as happening to the Body “through the full supply of every joint” (Eph. 4:16). The compound word “full supply” (επιχορηγίας) is made up of the noun “supply” (χορηγία), indicating *abundance*, prefixed by “επι”, which means *upon* (Phil. 1:19). This “full” or *complete abundance* each believer has in their possession is *the medium “through”* (δια) which the Body is built up. Contextually, this *tremendous potential* has its source in *the exercise of individual believer’s spiritual gifts* in conjunction with these Body members being *perfected for ministry by mentors* (Eph. 4:7, 12).

Next, unifying speech and instruction within the Church is achieved as gifted members function “according to the working in the measure of each one part” (Eph. 4:16). Our English word “energy” is derived from the noun translated “working” (ενεργίαν). It has already occurred two other times in this Book in reference to the *power of God available through the Holy Spirit*, which enables us to change our own lives as well as minister to the Body (1:19; 3:7). When each believer exercises their gifts “according to” (κατα) or *in line with* this divine energy, it will have a beneficial influence on the Church. In addition, as each member’s

gifts are exercised “in the measure” (μετρῶ), *amount* or *quantity* of “each one part” (each Body member), maximum edification can occur (Eph. 4:7, 13, 16).

Summarizing, this “edification” occurs in the “Body” to the extent that “every joint”, “each one part” (every believer), draws upon the “working” of the Holy Spirit to activate the “full supply” and varying “measure” of the gifts with which each of us has been endowed. How much we participate is a personal choice, but all Christians should understand this is the *primary purpose for which we were created anew in Christ*. Then, Christ, our Head, will judge each of us in regard to how we live up to this responsibility (1 Cor. 3:10-23; 2 Cor. 5:10; Eph. 4:15).

Finally, Paul indicates the proper working of the Body will manifest itself in a manner “resulting in” (εἰς – moving it *in the direction of*) “a building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The noun “building up” (οἰκοδομῆν) is the same word which occurs in verse 12 and illustrates *the building of a house*. It is often translated *edification* which indicates *improvement*. Just as a property is improved with landscaping and construction, in the same way, the Body of Christ grows toward perfection through the efforts of each individual member who properly uses their gifts. Note how it says this edification is “of itself” or *associated with* (genitive case) “itself”. God does not cause the “increase” (αὐξήσιν), *growth* or *development* of the Body to happen, this is left up to each individual Body member. Salvation is one hundred percent a result of the action of God. On the other hand, *if any spiritual growth is to occur in the Body, believers are obligated to take the initiative* by following His written instructions while walking in the power of His Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:15-18; Phil. 3:12-16; Col. 3:1-2, 12-17).

Paul finishes his point by emphasizing how the Body is edified when Christians walk “in love”. The preposition “in” (ἐν) means we are to live our lives *in the realm of “love”* (ἀγαπῆ). When a believer is controlled by this quality, he or she will *act in a manner which is beneficial to others* – the primary application of “love” (Rom. 12:9-21; 1 Cor. 13:4-7). Our need for this characteristic is repeated three times in this context alone (Eph. 4:2, 15, 16). Since the teachings in this passage express some divine qualities the Body of Christ is to implement, internalizing them will launch us on a *path of experiencing “love”*, for they represent the character of God who “is love” (Eph. 3:18-19; 5:1-2; 1 John 4:8).

Concluding the exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16, if believers are to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling for which we were called”, we need to put on the qualities of humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and a supportive nature while lovingly endeavoring to walk in unison with one another (vv. 1-3). This is possible when our foundation of operation is built on God’s solid basis of *the seven ones* provided to accomplish this unity, supplemented by the gifted members Jesus Christ gave the Church (vv. 4-11). As individual believers continue to learn God’s

truth, properly apply it, and become involved in ministry, spiritual maturity will materialize in all Body members who are affected (vv. 12-13). Also, this *love-in-action* will help Christians avoid temptations flung our way by the world (v. 14). Ultimately, all things in the lives of the saints are to move in the direction of our Head, Christ, as well as toward the building up of the Body (vv. 15-16).

A Spirit-assisted understanding of this context will lead to the realization each believer's connection with our Head and the growth which happens in the Body of Christ are inseparable realities. These two goals can only happen simultaneously. God is "love" and *He wants his children to fully participate in what He is*. In simple terms, this passage illustrates how believers can experience *the full extent of God's love* both as individual members and within Our Community. This is how the Body of Christ transitions from our position of God's "fullness", which we have in Christ, to the place we can make some progress toward becoming "the fullness of God" while we are still on earth (Eph. 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). Ultimately, this transformation will become complete when Christ returns and all His children will come into full conformity with His glorified image (Rom. 8:29; Phil. 1:6; 3:20-21; Col. 3:3-4; Titus 2:13).

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Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.

Appendix I:

A question may arise about whether Paul's use of the word "gift" (δωρεα), meaning *free gift*, in this verse describes the same gifts as the word "χαρισμα", meaning *unmerited gift*, used in other contexts (Rom. 1:11, 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7, 12:4, 9, 28, 30-31). These two words for "gift", occurring with "grace" (χαρις) in the following passages, provide ample evidence they both refer to spiritual gifts which are active in the Church today. First, "χαρις" is used in a similar manner related to both "χαρισμα" (Rom. 12:3, 6) and "δωρεα" (Eph. 3:7, 4:7). In Ephesians 3:7, "grace" was the source from which Paul received the "gift" (δωρεαν) making him a "minister" of the gospel. This gift was employed in conjunction with his other gifts of *prophecy*, *apostleship* and *tongues* in order to distribute the administration of the Grace of God (Acts 13:1; Romans 12:7; 1 Cor. 14:18; Eph. 1:1, 2:20, 3:2-3, 7).

Next, "χαρισμα" and "δωρεα" are used interchangeably in Romans 5:15-17. Both define the "gift" believers possess through Christ which refers to that which results in *righteousness* and qualifies us to *reign in life*. This usage confirms these two words can define dual aspects of the same thing. Finally, Paul speaks twice about a "gift" (χαρισμα) possessed by Timothy, while using *present tense*

verbs, which is *actively functioning* in him (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). These occurrences demonstrate “*χαρισμα*” is not only used to describe *manifest* or *sign gifts* which ceased when Church revelation was complete, but it also refers to gifts which endure (1 Cor. 1:22, 12:7, 13:8-13, 14:22). These uses of the words for “gift” (*δωρεα* and *χαρισμα*) in the post-Acts Epistles (Ephesians and First & Second Timothy) define both the *free* and *unmerited* nature of our *present day spiritual gifts*.

Appendix II:

Much debate has risen from the way Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, because he renders the final phrase of this verse, “he gave gifts to men”. Whereas, literal translations, such as the *King James Version*, translate the Hebrew, “thou has received gifts for men”. The *Septuagint* similarly reads, “thou has received gifts for man”. These translations support the teaching in this Psalm that God will receive the “spoils” of victory over Israel’s enemies then reserve it for His people. No one knows exactly how Paul arrived at his translation of this verse, but it is very similar to *The Targum*, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew text, containing notes inserted by Rabbis. This was the most common Old Testament used by Jews in Paul’s day as well as before the Christian era. It reads, “you . . . gave them as gifts to the children of men”. Also, possible sources of Paul’s version are the pre-Christian Syriac *Peshitta* reading “You . . . gave gifts to the sons of men” and the Arabic version which says “and he gave gifts to men”. Regardless from where this record originated, Christians should accept what is found in the text of Ephesians to be both legitimate and accurate in order to accomplish God’s purpose. For, Paul, like all Scripture writers, received the exact words he wrote under the leading of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). [StudyLight.org, Difficult Sayings, Does Paul misquote Psalm 68:18? Ephesians 4:8; John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible, Psalm 68:18] ♦