

Building Up the Body of Christ by Equipping the Saints: An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11–16

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Abstract

Ephesians 4:11–16 deals with building up the body of Christ using a variety of gifts apportioned by Christ. In an attempt to comprehend this biblical text, some scholars have suggested that the work of ministry is solely for the clergy. In contrast, others believe the work of ministry is also for every believer. A proper study of Ephesians 4:11–16 provides an understanding that can correct erroneous views. The study used the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics to study Ephesians 4:11–16. This study recognizes that every believer has received grace gift(s) for edifying the church and examines the functions of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in building up the body of Christ. Finally, churches ought to focus on attaining “unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13a) and “maturity of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13b).

Keywords: Apostles, Prophets, Saints, Body of Christ, Unity, Maturity, Doctrine, Ephesians

Introduction

Ephesians 4:11–16 specifies some grace gifts for equipping the believers for ministry. The passage also highlights the aim of the equipping process, the outcomes of adequately equipped saints, and the implication of truth and love in the growth of believers. Hoehner remarks that verses 11–16 explain the distribution of gifts (v. 11) for enabling believers to minister (v. 12) towards the goal of edifying or building up the body of Christ. Further, the verses highlight the all-crucial ingredient for growth: love.¹ On the significance of the metaphor used, Stott argues

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2002), 578-579.

that “although the body metaphor can certainly accommodate the concept of distinct pastorate (in terms of one ministry 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.”² Thus, a proper study of the passage develops an understanding that can dispel erroneous views. This study also significantly enhances the awareness of Christian ministry within and outside the church. When every believer is prepared for ministry, growth in the church will be inevitable because of individual uniqueness in the body. In this pericope, the study highlights two ultimate goals: attaining “unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God” (v. 13a) and “maturity of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13b).

Background Information (Eph 4:11–16)

The apostle Paul wrote Ephesians in the early 60s during his first imprisonment in Rome.³ Some scholars dispute this claim; however, this study considers Paul as the author of Ephesians mainly because of internal attestation (Eph 1:1; 3:1). The letter targeted believers within the broader region of Asia Minor, where Paul did his missionary work. The recipients of the epistle were mainly Gentile believers in the churches of Asia Minor. The circumstances surrounding the writing of this epistle include Paul’s imprisonment and suffering for the gospel (Eph 3:1, 13). Having done missionary work at Ephesus for over two years (Acts 19:8-10), Paul knew his audience intimately (Eph 1:15; 3:2; 3:4; 4:20–21) and even sent personalized greetings in the last section of the letter. There is no dominant issue addressed in the epistle;⁴ rather, it affirms the spiritual position of Gentiles based on Christ’s work on the cross.

Literary context

In Ephesians, Paul presents God’s redemptive plan for humankind and, consequently, the church’s diverse nature. The plan involved reconciling humanity to God “through Christ’s death on the cross” (Eph 2:16); and breaking “the hostility that existed between Jews and Gentiles, thereby bringing peace” (Eph 2:14, 15). The new union between Jews and Gentiles in Christ gave birth (formed) the church (Eph 2:14–21). Chapters 1–3 are doctrinal, while chapters 4–6

² John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Norton Street, Nottingham NG7 3HR, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 167.

³ For more background details see: D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo., and Leon Morris. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan publishing, 1992), 305-309.

⁴ Charles Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 12.

present the exhortations. In chapter 4, Paul addresses the issue of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (4:3), unity in diversity in the body (v. 7), and the building of the body of Christ through the grace gifts given by the exalted Christ's (vv.7–16). Specifically, Ephesians 4:11–16 describes gifts given by Christ for the edification of the church, which is His body.

Exegesis of Ephesian 4:11–16

The Distributions of the Grace Gifts (Eph 4:11)

Greek Text: Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους.⁵

Translation: And he himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers.

The coordinate conjunction Καὶ (and) links verse 11 to the previous verses. The pronoun αὐτὸς refers back to Christ the subject in verse 7. Paul utilizes the constative aorist ἔδωκεν (he gave) with the idea of reporting in the simple past tense. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit gives gifts (1 Cor 12:11); however, in Ephesians, Christ is the giver of the gifts. Each person is gifted with a particular function in the community of believers.⁶ The subsection below looks at these listed gifts and functions. 1 Corinthians 12:4–11 gives the varieties of gifts by the Spirit to individual church members, but in Ephesians 4:11, the “gifts” are persons who exercise those ministries.⁷

Apostle(s)

In the New Testament Greek, the noun ἀπόστολος (apostle) means “a delegate, messenger,” or “one sent forth with orders.”⁸ It also means one who fulfills the role of being a special messenger.⁹ The narrators of the Synoptic Gospels often applied this word to the twelve disciples of Christ.¹⁰ The term ἀπόστολος also refers to the prominent Christian leaders in the apostolic church like Paul, Barnabas, and the disciples of Jesus. It is worth noting that the term also

⁵ Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th Edition, Stuttgart: Biblgesellschaft, 1993.

⁶ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 538.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon. and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 345.

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, trans., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (not specified: International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889), 68.

⁹ J. P. Louw and Eugene A Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Second edition (New York, USA: United Bible Societies, 1988), 542.

¹⁰ See: Mathew 10:2; Mark 6:30; Luke 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10.

generally referred to ministers of the gospel other than the Twelve (Acts 14:14, 2 Cor 8: 23; 2 Pet 3:2), especially to the servants who submit to the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of Christ (1 John 4:1, 1 Tim 1:6–7, Rev 2:2). The following subsection looks at the prophetic office.¹¹ The apostles and prophets were instrumental in building “the foundation of the church” (Eph 2:20). The founding apostles propagated the gospel to various parts of the ancient world.

Prophet(s)

In the NT, the noun προφήτης (prophet) means the one who speaks for God, proclaiming what God wants to make known.¹² This understanding takes two dimensions. First, it refers to one who declares God’s message publicly as a forth-teller, as a teacher, admonisher, or preacher (1 Cor 14:29), and second, one who foretells a special message for the future (Acts 21:10). The prophets, as Lincoln put it, are special mediators of divine revelation.¹³

In Ephesians 4:11, the word προφήτας refers to those endowed with the gift of προφητεία (prophecy) or rather, one with a special gift and calling to proclaim the divine message, interpret the times, and urge people to believe in Christ for salvation¹⁴ (forth-telling). The prophets teach, admonish, and preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the body of Christ.

Evangelist(s)

In the NT, two Greek words are associated with an evangelist’s function. The first is εὐαγγελίζω, which conveys the idea of preaching. The second is κηρύσσω which carries the idea of proclaiming or heralding the good news of the kingdom of God.¹⁵ Thus, an evangelist preaches, declares, and announces the gospel or good news about the kingdom of God to the people. The apostles also performed this function as they founded churches in different areas.

The noun εὐαγγελιστής (evangelist) in its plural form (above) only occurs three times in three verses in the NT and the entire Bible (Acts 21:8, Eph 4:11, 2 Tim 4:5). These servants “preached and proclaimed the good news of the gospel” (Acts 8:25). Though the term εὐαγγελιστής indicates only an individual who ‘announces the gospel,’ early usage also suggests

¹¹ F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Second edition (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24.

¹² Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) (23653 προφήτης).

¹³ Andrew T Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary [v. 42]: Ephesians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 249.

¹⁴ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (23653 προφήτης).

¹⁵ F.F Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 346.

that often such a person would move from place to place announcing the good news.¹⁶ Evangelists edify the church by going out and proclaiming God's word to the world.

Shepherd(s)

The church is metaphorically the flock of God (Acts 20:28), Jesus' lambs and sheep (John 21:15, 16). Consequently, those who take care of the church of God are metaphorically known as ποιμένας (shepherds) according to Ephesians 4:11. The shepherds in the Early Church were apostles, elders, and deacons (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:4; 20:17, 28; 1 Tim 3:1, 8; 5:17).

The grammatical construction, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, with a definite article before "shepherds" and lacking before "teachers," is of some significance. It fits the Granville Sharp theory of two nouns of the same case, connected by καὶ with the article preceding the first noun but not found in the second one. In such a construction, the latter noun refers to the same person expressed by the first; thus, pastors and teachers refer to the same person. Concerning this construction, Barth opines that τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους refers to one ministry, that is, "teaching-shepherds."¹⁷ Further, Lincoln adds that these two ministries (shepherding and teaching) in the early church had varied distinctiveness and were not necessarily performed by a single individual.¹⁸

Teacher(s)

In the NT, διδάσκαλος (teacher) is a person who instructs concerning the things of God and the duties of humankind.¹⁹ In Ephesians 4:11, Christ gave some to be διδασκάλους (teachers). The twelve apostles, Paul, Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, Titus, and Timothy, were some teachers besides the elders in the earlier church (Acts 2:42; 6:4; 13:1; 14:23; 21:17,30). The function of the teachers, as Lincoln states with Mitton,²⁰ was mainly "preserving, transmitting, expounding, interpreting and applying the apostolic gospel and tradition along with Jewish Scriptures. They were specialists in the inculcation of Christian norms and values and the conduct appropriate to them, and in this way became particularly associated with the qualities of

¹⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 542.

¹⁷ Markus Barth, *Ephesians 1-3: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), 438–39.

¹⁸ Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 250.

¹⁹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 416.

²⁰ C. Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, The New Century Bible CommentaryW (London: Marshall, Morgan & Stott Publ. Ltd., 1973), 150.

wisdom and knowledge.”²¹ So, Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be shepherds and teachers with goals.

The Purpose and Ultimate Goal of the Grace Gifts (v. 12)

Greek Text and Translation: πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ: For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.

The Purpose of Grace Gifts (v. 12a)

The preposition πρὸς (for) placed before the accusative τὸν καταρτισμὸν (the equipping) introduces “a near purpose in relation to an ultimate goal ‘for the purpose of, with a view to.’” The Greek word τὸν καταρτισμὸν (equipping) has the idea of making “someone completely adequate or sufficient for something – ‘to make adequate, to furnish completely, to cause to be fully qualified, adequacy.’”²² The saints are to be equipped εἰς ἔργον διακονίας (for the work of ministry). The phrase εἰς ἔργον is an adverbial accusative of termination with purpose as focus.

The genitive διακονίας (of ministry/service) further describes εἰς ἔργον. It can be taken as a genitive of apposition, to mean work/service that ‘is ministry,’ or a descriptive genitive, to mean work that “is characterized by/consist of service.”²³ Thus the saints are equipped for work that consists of service. Hoehner argues that ministry involves “serving the Lord by ministering to one another” and that the word promotes the idea of activity.²⁴ However, Lincoln argues against the use of Ephesians 4:12 for justifying equipping of saints,²⁵ while Gordon argues against the whole idea of equipping the saints (laity) for ministry.²⁶ Gordon suggests that the gifted ministers perfect the saints (v. 12a) as their first purpose, and the second purpose is doing the work of ministry, thus taking the two phrases parallel.²⁷ Hoehner rightly opines that every believer must do the work of ministry, as supported by verse 7, which asserts that each believer is given grace; similarly, verse 16 considers edification as a work of each individual member of the body of Christ and not a select group.²⁸ I agree with Liefeld that the phrase “the equipping

²¹ Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 251.

²² Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (3529 καταρτισμός).

²³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 550.

²⁴ Hoehner, 550.

²⁵ Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 253.

²⁶ David Gordon T., “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, No. 1 (March 1994): 69–78.

²⁷ Gordon, 71, 72.

²⁸ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 549.

and work of ministry/service” in verse 12 are in sequence rather parallel, with the implication that the specially gifted ministers (verse 11) prepare the saints to do the works of service.²⁹ Hence, there is no distinction between the clergy and the laity concerning service/ministry.³⁰ Every believer should be involved in the work of service (Eph 4:16). The second half of the verse presents the ultimate goal for the gift of grace to all the saints.

The Ultimate Goal for Grace Gifts (v. 12b)

The grace gifts given to persons are to equip the saints for the work of ministry, which in turn has the ultimate goal³¹ οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (for the building of the body of Christ). Thus, the ultimate goal for the gift of grace to the equipped saints is to build up the body of Christ, which figuratively means—spiritual encouragement³² and edification. The object for this spiritual encouragement and edification σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (of the body of Christ); which is a metaphor for the church (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:13; Eph 1:22, 23; 4:12, 16; 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19; 3:15).³³ Building up the body of Christ aims at three specific areas as elaborated in the following verse.

Aim of the Building of the Body of Christ (v.13)

Greek Text: μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Translation: Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the maturity of the fulness of Christ.

i. Unity of the Faith

Here, the Greek conjunction μέχρι (until) indicates the aim or goal.³⁴ Hoehner notes that μέχρι with an aorist subjunctive without ἄν indicates an indefinite future,³⁵ with both a prospective and a final force of building up the body of Christ.³⁶ The aim is that καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες³⁷ (literal: we may all attain). The constative aorist καταντήσωμεν (we may attain) indicates the

²⁹ Walter Liefeld, *Ephesians*, vol. 10, The IVP New Testament Series (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1997), 106.

³⁰ As proposed by Gordon, “‘Equipping’ Ministry in Ephesians 4?”

³¹ The idea of ultimate goal is from the adverbial accusative of termination εἰς οἰκοδομὴν with focus on the body of Christ.

³² Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (1943) οἰκοδομη).

³³ Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 195.

³⁴ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1977, 408.

³⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 552.

³⁶ Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 255.

³⁷ πάντες (all) refers to the body of Christ, both collectively and individually.

probability force in the subjunctive mood. The aim (that is, “unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son and mature manhood” v. 13) is prospective- likely to be attained; it is probable in an indefinite future.

The Greek word ἐνότης (unity) implies a state of oneness.³⁸ Building up the body of Christ is aimed at unity/oneness as the first primary purpose. The genitive τῆς πίστεως (of the faith) can either be qualitative genitive meaning, a kind of unity that relate to Christian belief, or objective genitive, that is, the content of the faith.³⁹ Thus, “unity of the faith” is better understood as the unity of the belief in God or salvation⁴⁰ or the appropriation of all that is contained in its one faith.⁴¹ Further, such a unity is not organizational unity but practical unity since it is in the context of the body of believers.⁴² It is not only unity of the faith (belief) but also unity “of the knowledge of the Son of God” (v.13).

ii. Unity of the Knowledge of the Son of God

The conjunction καὶ (and) links the first description of the object (unity) to the second description of the same. First, unity is related to faith; and second, it is related to τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (the knowledge of the Son of God). Here, τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως (as a qualitative genitive) refers to true knowledge that emanates from the Son (Jesus Christ). Hence, the first purpose of building the body of Christ is to attain unity of the faith; the second is the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God (v.13).

iii. To a Mature Man

The third purpose is to attain εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον (to a mature/ perfect/ complete man).⁴³ At this point, the author figuratively uses the analogy of a mature man in contrast to an infant in verse 14⁴⁴ to illustrate his point. The author refers to the church as a corporate body using the word mature man/ manhood.⁴⁵ In the analogy, he distinguishes between a man and a boy. A complete man is characterized by the endowment of precise and correct knowledge (as described above)

³⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 613.

³⁹ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553.

⁴⁰ Frederick W. Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 285.

⁴¹ Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 255.

⁴² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 553.

⁴³ William F Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press and Cambridge University Press, 1957), 817.

⁴⁴ Arndt and Gingrich, 66.

⁴⁵ Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (London, New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 205.

and with the added notion of intelligence and virtue.⁴⁶ The use of the singular ἄνδρα τέλειον (mature man) instead of plural strongly indicates that the mature man is the church, the corporate body of believers, as opposed to individual believers.⁴⁷ Therefore, the gifts of grace have been given to build up the body of Christ until we all may attain maturity. Hoehner observes, especially in this context, that “often we tend to think spiritual maturity as only individual growth in the Lord, but in this passage, the emphasis is on the importance of body growth, resulting in unity.”⁴⁸ The author further describes the mature man as εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (to the measure of the maturity⁴⁹ of the fullness of Christ).⁵⁰ Figuratively, the author utilizes the word μέτρον (measure) with the implication of determining the extent or limit⁵¹ of the maturity of a mature man. Hence, the actual extent of such maturity is complete maturity in Christ.

Result of Complete Maturity (Eph 4:14, 15a)

Greek Text: ¹⁴ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης, ¹⁵ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός,

Translation: So that we may no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful schemes, but speaking the truth in love, we (are to) grow up into him in every way, into him who is the Head, Christ.

Here, the conjunction ἵνα (so that) is used with the negation μηκέτι (no longer) to introduce a result clause.⁵² When the body of Christ as a corporate body attains to a mature man, the result is that they μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι (no longer be children). The adverb μηκέτι expresses their state of being like children; their state as spiritual infants.⁵³ The present participles κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας (tossed here and there by

⁴⁶ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1977, 45.

⁴⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 555.

⁴⁸ Hoehner, 556.

⁴⁹ Measure of the maturity (instead of stature, as in ESV, NKJV, ASV), Walter F. Taylor and John H. P. Reumann, *Ephesians, Colossians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1985), 67.

⁵⁰ Ephesians 4:15, Col 2:2b–3.

⁵¹ Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1977, 408.

⁵² Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 471–73.

⁵³ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 561.

waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine) further describes “one who is childish and lacks stability.”⁵⁴ The imagery used here is that of a boat or a ship in a water body, with turbulent waves and blowing winds, thus unstable.⁵⁵ The state of being children, characterized by spiritual immaturity⁵⁶ and doctrinal instability, makes the church susceptible to every kind of teaching, whether right or wrong.

Moving on, the instrumental dative ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ (by the trickery) expresses the means and manner in which children are “tossed about by waves and carried by every wind of teaching” (4:14).⁵⁷ This trickery specifically is τῶν ἀνθρώπων (of men).⁵⁸ Not only by trickery are children tossed and carried about, but also ἐν πανουργίᾳ⁵⁹ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης (by craftiness in deceitful schemes). The phrase ἐν πανουργίᾳ (by craftiness) signifies unscrupulous evildoing.⁶⁰ Such craftiness is focused on πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης (deceitful schemes). The purpose is geared toward deception, just as Bruce asserts that the “winds of doctrine” motive is to lead astray.⁶¹

Growing Up into Him

The adversative conjunction δὲ (rather) introduces verse 15 as an opposition to the previous verse (v.14). The phrase ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ (speaking truth in love) shows how the truth should be conveyed.

The conjunction δὲ (rather) also connects to the paragraph’s line of thought (4:11–16). He gave some to be ministers (v.11) for building the body of Christ (v.12). The ultimate goal is so that we all attain unity and complete maturity (v.13), that we may no longer be children (v.14). Rather, being truthful in love αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός (we may grow up in every way into him who is the Head, Christ). The constative aorist αὐξήσωμεν (we may grow up) indicates that the body of Christ ought to grow up as a unit or as a whole, to be like him τὰ πάντα (in all things). Christ is the ultimate standard or measure of believers’ maturity. And as Lincoln suggests, “proper growth and progress is to take place in every way,

⁵⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 561.

⁵⁵ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 214.

⁵⁶ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon. and to the Ephesians*, 351.

⁵⁷ Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 10:109. Liefeld explains that the use of the term “trickery/cunning” denotes dice playing and thus connotes the clever ways of a professional gambler tricks an opponent.

⁵⁸ Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary*, 207.

⁵⁹ Dative of means

⁶⁰ Liefeld, *Ephesians*, 10:109.

⁶¹ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon. and to the Ephesians*, 351.

that is, in every aspect of the church's life and particularly in those aspects singled out earlier: in unity, in knowledge, and in being truthful the truth in love."⁶² Therefore, the author states in the negative that we should no longer be infants but grow in every way into Christlikeness.

Christ As the Head in Relation to the Body (Eph 4:15b, 16)

Greek Text: ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβάζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἑνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ

Translation: from whom the whole body, being joined and knit together by every joint of supply, according to the working in the measure of each individual part, causes growth of the body for building itself up in love.

As a connection to the previous verses, rather than being children, Paul states that gifts of grace facilitate the body of Christ to *grow in all things into him, who is the Head, Christ*. It is not easy to understand the relationship between Christ being ἡ κεφαλὴ (the Head) and growth. Hoehner suggests that Christ's headship is better understood to imply preeminence or prominence. Since context "stresses that the goal or end of our growth is the standard of Christ's stature (*maturity*)," Christ is identified as the Head⁶³—the model for the believer.⁶⁴ The prepositional phrase ἐξ οὗ (from whom) emphasizes that Christ is the source of growth of the body, that is, the church. Christ, as the Head, is not only the measure of maturity but also the enabling source of growth of the body.⁶⁵ Thus, it is from Christ that the whole body is joined and knit together to realize growth. The imagery of joints, as members of the body that bind different parts together, is brought into play. There is coordination between the joints and other parts of the body, so each component works effectively to bring about growth. The outcome is that the body nourishes (edifies) ἑαυτοῦ (itself), implying the benefit it derived from each individual part. The dative ἐν ἀγάπῃ (in love) qualifies the phrase "edifies itself." The prepositional phrase ἐν ἀγάπῃ is a dative of manner. Love must be the motivation to express the grace gifts given to all believers. Love binds all things (1 Cor 13:1–13).

⁶² Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary* [v. 42], 261.

⁶³ See also: Ephesians 1:22, 5:23; Colossians 1:18.

⁶⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 567.

⁶⁵ Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, 116.

Summary of Exegetical Findings

The studies on the five functions (of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) reveal that most of their roles overlap. The apostles and prophets teach, admonish, and preach the message of the kingdom of God to the church, the body of Christ. Besides that, some prophets and prophetesses in the NT foretold what was to happen in the future (Acts 11:27–28, 21:8–11). The primary function of an evangelist is to proclaim and announce the good news of the kingdom of God. The ministry of evangelists targets unbelievers, hence vital for increasing numbers in the community of believers. Though shepherds have the specific role of taking care of church members, they often are required to have the skill of teaching the word. Thus, their function overlaps with that of teachers.

The purpose of Christ giving some grace gifts summarized above is to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building the body of Christ. The process of preparing has more to do with making the saints entirely adequate for ministry-related tasks. The participation of all believers in ministry edifies the body of Christ.

It is worth underscoring that building the body of Christ is a growth process for all believers. The growth process continues until all believers attain 1) the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and 2) a mature man (generic) to measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ. The extent or limit of maturity for believers is that of complete maturity in Christ. Maturity ensures that believers would no longer be children (figuratively, infants in spiritual matters, who are misled easily by false teachings); but rather grow up in every way into Christ, who is the Head (Christ—a perfect example and model for believers).

Finally, every believer must utilize their grace gift from Christ (v. 7) appropriately for the growth and edification of the body of Christ, but do it in love.

Application

This study is critical for individual believers and the church corporately. Paul states the diversity in the body of Christ through the diverse gifts given to every believer (v. 7), reminding us of the various acts of divine grace in the church today. No Christian believer should look down on themselves, believing they lack a gift(s). Christ has given each person a grace gift as he determines (v. 7). Just as Christ gave grace gifts to persons in the first Century church (v. 11), so has he continues to give ‘grace gifts to both men and women across centuries for equipping the

saints for the work of ministry. The gifts are not for the personal benefit of the leaders/ministers but ought to be used to help the church grow to maturity.⁶⁶ All equipped believers must be involved in the work of ministry, which is key to building the body of Christ.

Church growth initiatives should aim at attaining; first, unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God (v. 13a). The church of Jesus Christ has only ‘one faith’ (v.5) and one true knowledge base, that is, the saving knowledge of Christ Jesus. Also, as Snodgrass states, unity is not merely “in ideas that we believe, but a unity resulting from the experience of receiving the gospel and living with Christ.”⁶⁷ Therefore, there should be no divisions in the church (1 Cor 1:10), especially on the core tenets of faith. Second, church growth aims at attaining “to a mature person to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ” (v. 13b), a maturity whose extent or limit is to the measure of Christ. The aftermath of attaining unity⁶⁸ and complete manhood will protect the church from false teachings. Finally, being truthful in love must be exhibited in the growth of the churches into him, who is the Head, Christ. In all aspects of service and ministry, truth must be presented in love.

Conclusion

The thrust of Ephesian 4:11–16, in summary, is that Christ gave and continues to give grace gifts to his church to equip the saints; making the saints adequately prepared for effective work of ministry, which in turn leads to the ultimate goal of building the body of Christ. The implication is that every believer should be involved in the acts of service (serving the Lord, which in turn translates to service to the body of Christ). Corporate Unity and maturity (also involving individual participation in the growth process) should be the church’s goal. When such a two-fold aim is attained, the church is protected from false and confusing teachings emanating from human trickery and craftiness. The contribution of individual believers to the church’s growth ought to be done in love.

⁶⁶ Tokunboh Adeyemo, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 1433.

⁶⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 205.

⁶⁸ That is, unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son.

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