

An Exegetical Study of Ephesians 4:1-16

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1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε,

“Therefore, I urge you, I, the prisoner in the Lord, to conduct your life in a way that is worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Paul has laid the foundation for Christian living by recalling God's wonderful works on behalf of his people in the first three chapters of his letter to the Ephesians. Now he builds on that foundation. He writes, Παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς, I urge or admonish you. Παρακαλῶ is a gentle word which suggests that someone calls another to his side in order to give encouragement, much as a coach gathers his team around him to give a “peptalk.”

With οὖν St. Paul ties what he now has to say to all that he has previously said about the wonderful works of God on behalf of his people. All that he has said up to this point is to motivate his hearers to heed his encouragement. The word often marks the transition from telling of God's redemptive acts to living the life of sanctification. In Romans 12, Paul writes: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices ...” In 1 Corinthians 6, he writes, “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body...” And in Colossians 3: “You have been raised with Christ ... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...”

Paul also adds motivation on a more personal level. He refers to himself as ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ, the prisoner in the Lord. Paul was a prisoner because of his connection with the Lord Jesus and for no other reason. This is not a call for sympathy on Paul's part, but his imprisonment is evidence of his faithfulness to Christ. So, as one who is himself faithful, he admonishes others. The description also serves, on the one hand, as a reminder that Paul's chains were part of God's mysterious plan to bring the Gospel to Rome, and on the other hand, to add some weight to Paul's words of encouragement. “When Paul the prisoner says, ‘I beseech you to walk worthy of your vocation,’ it means just a little more than if he had written from the security of a house in Jerusalem.”¹

Paul's encouragement is ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἧς ἐκλήθητε, to conduct your life in a way that is worthy of the calling with which you were called. The adverb ἀξίως comes from an adjective which means “that which balances the scales.” To περιπατῆσαι worthy of their calling suggests that when one is called by God there is a certain kind of behavior, a way of conducting one's life, which balances, is equal to, the call which has been received.

κλησις is the Holy Spirit's effectual call through the Gospel to faith in Christ—the call that has produced acceptance, as opposed to the general gospel invitation which many reject. In the first chapter Paul gave a complete description of the calling the Ephesians had received. There he said that their calling included being chosen by the Father from eternity, being redeemed by the blood of God's Son, being adopted as children into God's heavenly family, and being sealed with the Holy Spirit. To this they were ἐκλήθητε. The passive suggests that this calling was God's work, not something that they contributed to or merited in any way. The aorist indicates that the calling is there, an accomplished and complete fact, with nothing lacking.

Paul's encouragement, then, does not mean that the Ephesians should somehow become worthy of having received this calling, that they should earn it as a right, nor does it mean that they need to make some contribution toward making their calling a fact. He simply wants his readers to realize what a glorious calling they have and gently urges them to live their lives accordingly.

The *κλησις* with which the Ephesians were called means that they belong to the *ἐκκλησία* of God. It will be worthwhile to remember that while the church in the proper sense of the term is invisible, its existence can nevertheless be recognized, namely, by the marks of the Church—the right use of Word and Sacrament—otherwise the Apostle’s admonition would be most impractical. As Luther says:

You might say: If now the church is altogether in the Spirit and something altogether spiritual, then no one will be able to know where anywhere in the world a part of it may be found; that [indeed] would be a strange and unheard of thing ... And what about Christ’s teaching that we should feed his lambs (Jn 21:16,17) and that of Paul that we should take heed to the church of God (Acts 20:28) and that of Peter that we should feed the flock of Christ (1 Pet 5:2) if the church can nowhere in the world be found in certain places? For who could preach to spirits? or what spirit could preach to us?ⁱⁱ

How could we deal with one another in the ways Paul describes in the following verses or put his encouragements into practice “if the church is altogether spiritual?” What he had expressed in general terms of “worthy living” Paul goes on to define and explain in the following verses.

2 μετὰ πάσης ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραΰτητος, μετὰ μακροθυμίας, ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων ἐν ἀγάπῃ,

With all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

To conduct one’s life in a way that is worthy of God’s glorious call requires first of all *ταπεινοφροσύνης*, lowly thinking, humility. The word occurs only rarely in non-biblical Greek and then with the sense of pusillanimity (cowardice) to describe a virtue “unrecognized or repudiated in Graeco-Roman ethics” but glorified in Christianity.ⁱⁱⁱ Paul shows us perfect humility when he shows us the humility of Christ in Philippians 2:5-8. Christ built the church by his humility and nothing is more destructive to it than a lack of humility in its members. That’s why St. Paul so often encouraged humility in his hearers. For example, he wrote to the Philippians: “In humility consider others better than yourselves” (2:3). Christian humility flows from a knowledge of our sin and utter unworthiness before God, and from the realization that we are saved by grace alone. This knowledge creates a mindset contrary to self-righteousness and conceit, a mindset which claims no merit and boasts no self-righteousness. Emphatically St. Paul adds *πάσης*, all. He means to say: “Always cultivate humility, genuine Christian humility.” The whole Christian life is to be characterized by this virtue.

And let it be coupled with *πραΰτης*, meekness, gentleness. *πραΰτης* is the gentle spirit which expresses itself in patient submissiveness to offense, free from malice and desire for revenge. Christ is again the perfect example of “meekness.” He says, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29). He showed his meekness in his Passion for “when they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats” (1 Pet 2:23).

To humility and gentleness is to be added patience. Paul says *μετὰ μακροθυμίας*, with patience, longsuffering. The one who is characterized by patience does not quickly fly into a rage, but rather submits to injuries and ills. Christians learn patience from the Lord, who “does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps 103:10).

In patience the Ephesians are to be *ἀνεχόμενοι ἀλλήλων*, bearing with one another, putting up with one another. The present participle denotes continuing action and matches the “all” in the first phrase. Rather than pushing others away on account of their faults and frailties, they are to keep holding to each other. To the Christians in Colosse St. Paul also wrote, “Bear with one another” (Col 3:13). This encouragement reminds us that no Christian will attain perfection in this life. We won’t be perfect. Our fellow Christians won’t be perfect. Let us then put up with the faults and failings of others, as we will want them to bear with us in our weakness.

All this is to be done ἐν ἀγάπῃ, in love. Love for God who loved us while we were still sinners, and love for our fellowmen for whom Christ also endured the cross. This is ἀγάπη love, love that takes into consideration the condition of its object and adjusts its actions accordingly. This is not love for friends based in the emotions or romantic love, but love that has its origin in the will—love that chooses to love though its object may be most unlovable. It is a love like God’s own love. “But God demonstrates his own love (ἀγάπην) for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

Note that what Paul has said applies to ἀλλήλων, one another, to those who have been called. Paul’s admonition to meekness and forbearance. In love, therefore, does not mean that false doctrine should be tolerated—or even that weaknesses of the flesh which are persisted in without repentance and false doctrine which is retained in spite of admonition should be tolerated. Meekness is not weakness.

Meekness and forbearance in love does not mean toleration of false teaching, silence in the face of denial of the truth or compromise with error; but It does mean meekness, patience and love in dealing with brethren who are in error.^{iv}

“When dealing with error that arrogantly demands tolerance as its right, then forbearance ceases to be a virtue.”^v That meekness and firmness are not mutually exclusive is clear from St. Peter’s words: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Pe 3:15,16).

3 σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης·

Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace.

Here is the climax, the real point of the admonition to walk worthy of your calling. In a spirit of humility, meekness, patience and loving forbearance, the Christians in Ephesus are to be σπουδάζοντες, making every effort, earnestly striving (note again the present participle), τηρεῖν, to keep, to guard as a precious treasure, τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος, the unity of the Spirit. τοῦ πνεύματος could refer to the unity of “spirit,” of attitude and emotions which exists between believers, the Christian spirit of concord. The ἐν πνεῦμα, however, of the next verse, which appears in parallel with εἰς κύριος (v.5) and εἰς πατὴρ (v.6) clearly refers to the Holy Spirit. This, together with the general New Testament doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the source of spiritual life in believers (Jn. 6:63; 1 Cor 12:3), the fact that Paul has already spoken in this letter of the Holy Spirit as the source of oneness among believers, and the analogy of 1 Corinthians 12:13, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body,” leads to the conclusion that τοῦ πνεύματος is a genitive of originating cause, “The unity which the Spirit produces or works.”^{vi}

This ἐνότης, unity, is the unity of which Luther speaks when he says of the Holy Spirit that he “calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (SC, II, 6). And again Luther writes:

I believe that there is upon earth a little holy group and congregation of pure saints, under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Ghost in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms (LC Art. III, 51).

Because it proceeds from the Spirit, this unity is of a spiritual nature. It is unity in spirit and in truth. Koehler describes it when he writes,

Unity of faith exists among all the members of the invisible Church as we confess with Luther ... No matter to which denomination a person may belong, or whether or not he is formally a member of any denomination, if he trusts for the forgiveness of his sins and for his eternal salvation solely in the merits of Christ, then he is in unity of faith with all other Christians.^{vii}

That this unity “exists,” though it is not visible to our eyes, is often overlooked. Archbishop Temple of Canterbury, for example, was quoted as saying: “I believe in the holy catholic church-and sincerely regret that it does not at present exist.” When the unity of the Spirit is equated with an external and visible unity of ecclesiastical organizations, as in the Archbishop’s words, the Apostle’s admonition is often incorrectly used to support ecumenical efforts and unionistic endeavors which aim to create unity. Note, however, that St. Paul urges the Ephesians to τηρεῖν, “to keep, in the sense of watchful care,” not “to create,” the unity of the Spirit. He speaks of this unity as a present reality, not as a goal toward which Christians ought to strive. “The tendency of the apostolic admonition is for the Christians to keep and preserve, not again to give up this unity or oneness, this already existing unity, this precious blessing, which was not achieved by their own conduct.”^{viii} This blessed unity is the answer to our Lord’s prayer “that all of them may be one (Jn 17:21).” To use Paul’s words to support ecumenical efforts and unionistic endeavors is to misuse his words. Prof. Kowalke says that any union “effected by disregard of differences in doctrine or by compromise or by agreement on an ambiguous doctrinal formula is a negation of the unity of the Holy Spirit.”^{ix} Again he says that to achieve outward union “by forgetting differences in doctrine, differences in faith and practice ... would be the exact contradiction of the unity of the faith.”^x The “Essay on Church Fellowship” in the Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod says “False doctrine undermines, breaks down, and destroys spiritual life...Adulterate the Word by omitting something, changing something, adding something, or compromising any part of it, and faith is endangered.”^{xi}

Far from serving to create or preserve true unity, toleration of false doctrine or comprise with error, even seemingly insignificant error, poses a serious threat to the unity of the Spirit. Thus Hermann Sasse says:

Only such agreement reached in the church as the association of external ties and rites serves the true unity of the church which preserves the means of grace in their purity. For these means of grace create and preserve the church as the association of faith and the Holy Spirit in men’s hearts, the true church that is always one, the Una Sancta. Ubi veritas, ibi unitas. For only through the means of grace the One Lord builds his Church, the Una Sancta which is his body.^{xii}

Since it is implicit in the phrase “unity of the Spirit” that this unity can only be preserved by the pure use of the means of grace, through which the Holy Spirit works, Paul goes on to speak of something else that serves to preserve the unity of the Spirit. It is ὁ σύνδεσμος τῆς εἰρήνης, the bond of peace. σύνδεσμος is that which binds together, that which keeps something together. εἰρήνη is peace, harmony, concord. τῆς εἰρήνης is an appositive genitive so that keeping the unity of the Spirit by means of the bond of peace, means “Peace is the bond that knits believers together. Therefore keep peace among yourselves, and the unity of the spirit will be preserved.” This peace, Professor Habeck says, “works like a cord that holds a package together.”^{xiii} When Christians demonstrate a spirit of humility, meekness, patience and forbearance, then they keep the bond of peace intact, while pride, impatience and intolerance threaten to sever the tie that binds them together.

4 ἐν σῶμα καὶ ἐν πνεῦμα, καθὼς καὶ ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ὑμῶν·

One body and one Spirit, just as also you were called to one hope through your calling.

Paul now explains the concept of “the unity of the Spirit.” He reminds his readers of what they have in common and discusses the different aspects of their spiritual unity. In order to strengthen the preceding encouragement to work zealously to preserve that oneness, Paul assembles the facts of the unity that Christians enjoy into three groups of three each. The first trio consists of *σῶμα* (body), *πνεῦμα* (spirit), and *ἐλπίς* (hope).

The unity of the Spirit consists first of all in this: that all who have been called to faith in Christ form “one body.” According to 1:22, this body is the church, of which Christ is the head. The fact that there is but one body of believers and that all who are called by the Gospel regardless of race or nationality or language or social condition are members of that body is a powerful reason for striving to keep the unity at the Spirit. For the body “is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free” (1 Cor. 12:12,13). That there is but one body of believers should create an attitude of mutual respect among believers as they remember that they “are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), and that “there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor 12:25).

What unites believers in this mystical body of Christ is *ἐν πνεῦμα*, one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. “God’s Spirit is, as it were, the soul of this body; the Christian Church.”^{xiv} Here is another evidence of the oneness that believers have, and another reason to strive to keep that unity, namely, that one and the same Holy Spirit lives in each of them, moves them and rules them.

Through that one Spirit each member of the body was *ἐκλήθητε ἐν μιᾷ ἐλπίδι*, called to one hope. Here is a third unifying factor for Christians to consider. Whereas at one time all of them had been “dead in transgressions and sins,” had “followed the ways of the world” and thus “were objects of wrath,” now by the common call of the Holy Spirit they all have a common hope, they all strive after the same goal, namely, the resurrection on the last day, acquittal in the judgment, and entrance into their inheritance. This shared hope effectively welded them together into one body which is animated by one Spirit.

Note that this is a positive statement of fact, not part of exhortation. It is made the more impressive by the lack of a connecting particle at verb. This phrase states the objective ground, or the basis in fact, on which the walk in lowliness, meekness, longsuffering and loving forbearance is urged, and of which it should be the result. “Stroke by stroke Paul simply points to what forms the basis of the unity on which his previous admonition rests.”^{xv}

5 εἷς κύριος, μία πίστις, ἐν βάπτισμα,

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

The second “trinity of unities” consists in the fact that for all Christians there is *εἷς κύριος*, one Lord, *μία πίστις*, one faith, and *ἐν βάπτισμα*, one baptism. Note the simplicity in this enumeration, and yet the elegance which is made all the more impressive by the use of the three genders of the numeral one: *εἷς*, *μία*, *ἐν*.

The “one Lord” is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of Christians, for He bought them with His precious blood. They belong to him, they serve him as their Lord, their master. “The Lord and Savior of all is the same, not only in His wonderful person as true God and true man, but also in his work. He did not prepare a complete salvation for some and a salvation that must be supplemented by works for others.”^{xvi}

Their “one faith” in the Lord Jesus is another unifying factor for Christians. Though some understand this faith to be the body of Christian doctrine, the *fides quae*, Kowalke writes: “That is the faith that God revealed to us in Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is the unchangeable truth of the Gospel.”^{xvii} But it seems more in keeping with the context to see this as the faith which believes, the *fides qua*, which connects us to our Lord and is created in baptism. “The faith by which Christ’s merits are appropriated is the same in every case. It is not that some trust in Christ completely while others rely to some extent on their own honor and merit.”^{xviii}

This faith was created or sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism. Holy Scripture knows only “one baptism for the remission of sins.” There is no such thing as a “Spirit-baptism” that is required as a supplement to

“water baptism,” for “all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ” (Gal 3:28). When Paul says there is “one baptism,” he does not mean to say that any form of baptism is alright or that any conception of baptism is proper so long as it is called baptism. It simply means that those who have been baptized according to Christ’s institution have received the same baptism—“a washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5). You will note that Paul focuses on Baptism as the unifying means of grace in the church instead of the Gospel in the Word or the Lord’s Supper. Professor Panning explains:

The Word would not be intelligible to a babe in arms. Nor does Paul cite the Lord’s Supper as the universal means of the Spirit. That is reserved for those who can examine themselves to ensure a worthy reception of Christ’s body and blood. Paul says rather that there is “one Baptism.” Baptism is the means which avails for all. It excludes no one. It puts infant and graybeard, parents and children, men and women on the same plane.^{xix}

Ἕξ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων, ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν.

One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul presents the third triad of unities in a different form from the first two. Where he had used the word “one” three times, now he uses it only once, *Ἕξ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων*, “one God and Father of all,” but uses three prepositions: *ἐπὶ*, *διὰ*, *ἐν*, to show the relationship that every child of God has to the Father in heaven.

Though there are innumerable conceptions about God floating around within and without the visible church, there is only one God. “For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords,’ yet for us there is but one God the Father, from whom all things came, and for whom we live” (1 Cor 8:5,6). That Paul does not teach here a universal brotherhood of man based on the Fatherhood of God is clear from the fact that he is addressing believers, those who have been called by the Holy Spirit to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a brotherhood of believers, since they all have one Father in heaven, but this is not the natural state of affairs; it is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Paul says in Galatians, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).

Believers know God not as some distant omniscient abstraction but as their Father *ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων*, who is over all. While it is true that God the Father is over all things, the special emphasis here is that he is over all believers. Every Christian acknowledges one Father who rules over them, from whom they request and receive blessings for body and soul and who orders the course of their lives so that all things work for their good. It is this Father who is “over all” to whom all believers pray; “Our Father, who art in heaven.” That same Father is *διὰ πάντων*, through all. He does his saving work through all the members of his church. He has made them kings and priests, “a royal priesthood ... (to) declare the praises of him who called them out darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9). He has made them lights to “shine before men that they may see your our good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:16). And he is *ἐν πᾶσιν*, in all. The Father has come to “make his home” (Jn 14:23) with his people. He has made the heart of each believer his temple (1 Cor 3:16), even as the church is “a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit guided St. Paul to structure verses 4-6 in such a way as to reveal the mystery of the Triune God. In each of the three verses, three unities are mentioned: in v. 4, one body, one Spirit, one calling; in v. 5, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; and in v. 6, above all, through all and in all, as descriptions of the relationship of God the Father to those who are his children by faith. Lenski also finds a reference to the Trinity in v.6:

This one God and Father, who is through all, is this by means of our one Lord as the Mediator, mediation (*διὰ*) involving a Mediator. Likewise, this one God and Father in all is in them by means of the Spirit even as *ἐν* is the preposition to express immanence that involves the Spirit.

So also when we consider how this one God is the Father of us all in the *Una Sancta*, our answer is through the Son and the Spirit. While v. 6 completes one Spirit and one Lord by adding one God and Father, it at the same time unites all Three Persons in their soteriological relation to us all.^{xx}

The use of these three triads, each of which focuses uses on one of the persons of the Triune God, has the effect of giving impressive strength to St. Paul's argument, since by faith in the Triune God Christians are not only united with one another, but by the Holy Spirit with the one Lord and the one God the Father. "Paul here makes conscious use of the doctrine of the Trinity and Unity of the Godhead to explain the abiding unity of the church and to give greater force to his admonition to walk worthy of our calling."^{xxi}

The unity that St. Paul has described is truly a wonderful and praiseworthy gift of God. The psalmist says: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity ... For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore" (Ps 133:1,3). As brothers in the ministry and members of the same synod we will want to be sure that we are "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" that we enjoy. And yet, let's be sure that we understand what is and what isn't destructive of that unity. Keeping the unity of the Spirit does not mean that one of us cannot be concerned about certain trends we may perceive or ask questions about things that are happening. Keeping the unity of the Spirit does not mean that one must never disagree with a proposal or a program. It was not destructive of the true unity of the Church for St. Paul to oppose St. Peter to his face (Gal 2:11). He was wrong to separate from the Gentiles. For Paul to have ignored his hypocrisy would not have served to preserve the unity of the Spirit, but would perhaps ultimately have destroyed it. When we have concerns about the work or words of another pastor or synodical official let those concerns be brought in a spirit of humility and gentleness, rather than angrily and arrogantly. And, by the same token, let those who hear concerns be patient and deal with those bringing them in love. Let constructive criticism be received in the spirit of the psalmist, who said: "Let a righteous man strike me, it is a kindness; Let him rebuke me—it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it" (Ps 141:5).

One sometimes gets the impression that any kind of genuine concern or honest question about a new method or program is destructive of our unity. Sometimes it seems that those who raise questions or concerns out of genuine concern and love for the Lord and his truth are looked upon as just trying to make waves or wanting to rock the boat. The one who dares to ask questions, or warn that something may be dangerous, can find himself feeling like Elijah at the end of Ahab's long finger, being asked: "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" The kind of humility and patience that Paul describes, both on the part of those who have concerns and on the part of those to whom concerns are expressed, will go a long way toward preserving the wonderful unity we enjoy.

Our practice as pastors is also an important factor in preserving the unity of the spirit. We all subscribe wholeheartedly to Article VII of the Augsburg Confession which says, "To the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike." Therefore we do not insist that every church be organized and structured in the same way, nor do we insist that there be synod-wide liturgical uniformity. However, those who learn church polity from sources other than *Shepherd Under Christ* and the synod's Model Constitution, and those who are in the avant-garde of liturgical renewal would do well to consider their brethren before implementing new procedures. This is especially true in our modern mobile society where people travel far and wide, and then bring word back home of all that they have seen and heard. Bearing with one another in love means recognizing that what I do in my church isn't just between God, my members and me, but will undoubtedly have an impact on other pastors and their people. Not only will great confusion arise from "everyone doing what is right in his own eyes," but our precious unity may also be jeopardized.

What St. Paul has said about the unity of believers in these verses is very similar to what he wrote in Romans 12:5, "In Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." And as

he continued in that letter: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us” (Rom 12:6), so now he reminds Christians that they have received gifts to use for the good of all.

7 Ἐνὶ δὲ ἐκάστῳ ἡμῶν ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

But to each one of us the grace has been given, in the measure determined by Christ who gave it.

The fact that all believers are inseparably united by faith might suggest that all believers are exactly alike, each one a mirror image of the other. But that is not the case. Unity does not mean uniformity. As St. Paul had written in 1 Cor. 12: “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men” (vv.4-6), so he now says Ἐνὶ δὲ ἐκάστῳ, to each one of you, ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις, the grace has been given. ἡ χάρις, the grace, is not “the basic grace that saves the believer by faith,”^{xxii} for that is the same, for all believers and does not vary “according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” But when saving grace has done its work, “it adds, as it were, certain abilities which vary from believer to believer.”^{xxiii} It is in this connection that St. Peter speaks of “God’s grace in its various forms (1 Pet 4:10).” This grace is sometimes called “endowing grace.” Stoeckhardt calls it the “charismatic endowment.” Professor Panning writes,

The word rendered “grace” can also be translated “gift.” That hits the thought exactly. To everyone of us Christ has given gifts. The next verse supports that, “When he (Christ) ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.”^{xxiv}

The TEV translates along this line: “Each one of us has been given a special gift.” The emphasis is on the ἐκάστῳ. “Each” is now contrasted with the previous “all.”

God’s gracious relation to all is a relation to each individual. Not one of them was left unregarded by him who is the God and Father of all, but each was made partaker of Christ’s gift of grace, and each, therefore, is able and stands pledged to do his part toward the maintenance of unity and peace.^{xxv}

These “special gifts” are given to the church by Christ, as Paul says κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Χριστοῦ is a subjective genitive; he is the dispenser of these spiritual gifts. μέτρον is first the vessel for measuring and then the portion measured out or the amount. δωρεᾶς serves to keep any believer from becoming conceited about the abilities he has been given or from complaining about the abilities he lacks, since the grace is a “gift” given by Christ. The NET says this grace “is measured out by Christ who gave it.” The purpose for which Christ gives these gifts of grace will be developed in vv. 11-16, but first Paul supports his statement that it is Christ who measures out and gives these gifts to his church.

8 διὸ λέγει,
Ἄναβας εἰς ὕψος ἠχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν,
ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

Therefore it says,

Having ascended on high, he led captivity captive; he gave gifts to men.

The quotation is from Psalm 68:19, but there are difficulties both with the passage itself and then with Paul's application of it. Paul introduces the quotation with *διὸ λέγει*, therefore he, that is God, or it, that is Scripture says. The Old Testament passage reads:

עָלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם שְׁבִיתָ שְׂבִי לְקַחַת מִתְּנוּת בְּאָדָם

You ascended on high, you led captivity captive, you received gifts among men.

The Psalm sings of God as the great champion of his people who in mighty battle rescues them from their enemies.

God “ascended on high” when the ark was enshrined in the temple in Jerusalem. This move completed the conquest of the Promised Land, which was now ruled by a king after God's own heart. God had received gifts from men, since his temple now occupied the center of the land Israel had taken from their enemies. But his “ascension” to Zion, great as it was, pointed to a greater ascension. In Eph 4:7-13 Paul applies these words to Christ's ascension after his death and resurrection.^{xxvi}

However when Paul quotes this passage from the Psalm he modifies it. This is not due to Paul's faulty memory. “We assume that Paul, when he made these changes, had solid ground to stand on. He was writing under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who had indited the Psalm in the Old Testament.”^{xxvii} He writes Ἀναβὰς εἰς ὕψος, having ascended on high. Notice that St. Paul changes the Hebrew finite verb to an aorist participle. He also modifies the second line by changing the second person of the psalm to the third person when he writes ἡχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν, he led captivity captive. “The allusion is to a triumphal procession in which marched the persons taken in war.”^{xxviii} These words explain the significance of our Lord's ascension into heaven—it was his victory parade. “Christ's ascension marks the completion of God's conquest of the earth. Christ has defeated and subjected sin, death and Satan,”^{xxix} Jesus had come to earth to meet the enemies that held sinners captive. Hebrews 2:17 says of Christ that he shared in our humanity “so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” And Jesus reminds us of our captivity to sin when he says: “Everyone who sins is a slave to sin” (Jn 8:34). Jesus met these enemies in mortal combat and defeated them all by his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. Thus Paul writes: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55-57). And again he writes: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15). The prison keepers were taken prisoner.

To this the psalmist adds “you received gifts among men.” Applied to Christ at his ascension, these words remind us that the ascension reveals that “Christ now has all power in heaven and in earth. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.”^{xxx} The gifts of power and glory which Christ received according to his human nature were not for him to use in heaven only, but also “among men” on earth. This agrees with the words of Psalm 2: 8,9 where God the Father says to God the Son: “Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” So when Paul modifies the Hebrew to read ἔδωκεν δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, he gave gifts to men, changing the verb from “received” to “gave,” his “interpretive translation” does not alter the sense of the Psalm. [While the first two changes were in line with the LXX, this one is not, although it agrees with the Targum and the Syriac version.] The gifts Christ received were gifts “among men,” for him to use on earth. Paul simply explains how Christ uses these gifts, namely, by distributing them to men. Lenski says:

Therefore, because all power was given to Christ, he gives to the disciples their mission and their gifts for this mission on earth (Mt 28:19,20). The words the Father gave to Jesus the latter, gave to the apostles (Jn 17:8); the mission he had received from the Father he bestows on the apostles (v.18); the glory the Father gave him he gave to them (v.22); where he is, they too are to be.^{xxxii}

Prof. Meyer comments on Paul's modifications of the Psalm: "Correctly so, in perfect agreement with the sense of the Psalm. For our Savior did not receive any gifts for his own person; whatever gifts he received, he received for those he came to save."^{xxxii}

Prof. Brug agrees, he says of Paul's modification of the Psalm:

Paul does this to stress the application of this passage to us. Christ has not only received gifts, but he shares with us the power he has received. He gives us gifts which enable us to join in the work of bringing people into his kingdom by announcing his victory to them. He gives us his word. He gives the church pastors, teachers and missionaries.^{xxxiii}

Paul's allusion to Psalm 68 establishes Christ's authority, as the victorious Ascended One, to give various gifts to men, The right and authority of Christ to give gifts to his church, however, did not come easily, as St. Paul now indicates.

9 τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστίν, εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς;

But what does "he ascended" mean, except that he also descended to the lower parts of the earth?

In this verse St. Paul anticipates the question: "How can he who is Lord of heaven ascend into heaven?" Paul supplies the answer when he writes τὸ δὲ Ἀνέβη τί ἐστίν, "But what does 'he ascended' mean," εἰ μὴ ὅτι καὶ κατέβη, "except that he also descended." He says that Christ's ascension presupposes a prior descent. The place to which Christ descended is described as τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς, the lower parts of the earth. Precisely what St. Paul means by "the lower parts of the earth" has been the subject of much conjecture.

Stoeckhardt, along with Kretzmann and G. Struck in *WLQ*, Vol 51, No.2, (See the Ed. note), understands the words to refer to Christ's descent into hell. Prof. Habeck understands the lower parts of the earth to be the grave, and cites Jesus' words in Mt 12:40, where he says the Son of Man will spend three days in "the heart of the earth." A third possibility is that the phrase refers in general to the exinanition (not the incarnation, as in the NET footnote). Thus Adolph Hoenecke, John Schaller and Prof. Meyer, who says, "As the ascent into heaven is a crowning event in the exaltation of Christ, so the descent 'into the lower parts of the earth' most likely refers to the exinanition."^{xxxiv} Schaller simply says, "Ephesians 4:9f does not refer to the descent into hell; the words plainly contrast earth and heaven."^{xxxv} The true contrast to the Savior's victory parade through the skies at his ascension is not the victory parade through the halls of hell, which is what the descent into hell was (Col 2:15), but the descent to poverty and meanness which he made when he humbled himself.

This understanding fits best with the context, for the previous verse spoke of victory in battle, "taking captivity captive." Christ did not enter that battle or fight that battle when he descended into hell. Rather he proclaimed his victory in battle. He entered and fought the battle against the enemies of our souls when he "made himself nothing" and "humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Php 2:7,8). Francis Pieper writes:

Luther aptly calls the exinanition the official garb of Christ. It is certainly remarkable armor and garb. The earthly warrior, out for victory, girds his sword to his side and displays his great

might. Christ's equipment for the victory to be gained is of quite another sort. Christ ... emptied himself, became lowly, altogether lowly, indeed nothing.^{xxxvi}

Though "he descended to the lower parts of the earth" may be "a cumbersome way" of describing the humiliation, as Prof. Habeck contends, it seems that the expression is balanced by the words of the next verse, *ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν*, far above all the heavens, a truth that Paul had earlier described in simpler terms when he said that God seated Christ at his right hand "in the heavenly realms" (1:20). And it expresses the fact that Christ did not appear among men as God and Lord, but "in the form of a servant," being born of the virgin Mary, living in lowliness, suffering under Pontius Pilate, being crucified, dying and being buried, and then was highly exalted by his heavenly Father.

10 ὁ καταβάς αὐτός ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν, ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα.

The One who descended is the same One who ascended high above all the heavens, in order to fill the entire universe.

Having established that it was possible for Christ to ascend, since he had previously descended to the lower parts of the earth, Paul now explains the meaning of Christ's ascension. He writes, *ὁ καταβάς αὐτός*, the one who descended, *ἐστιν καὶ ὁ ἀναβάς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν*, is also the one who ascended high above all the heavens. These words contrast the deepest depths of the manger, the cross and the grave to which Christ descended with the highest heights to which he then ascended. In this connection Schaller says,

The heaven which the Scriptures name as the *terminus ad quem* of the ascension is certainly not the sidereal heaven which the astronomer explores, but neither is it, properly speaking, the heaven inhabited by saints and angels. From Eph 1:20f; 4:10; Hebrews 4:14 we learn that the word here denotes the state of ineffable glory upon which Christ entered when he sat down at the right hand of God.^{xxxvii}

Thus the words "high above all the heavens," are simply another way of saying what Paul said earlier about God seating Christ "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church" (Eph. 1:21,22). In this way Paul confirms that Christ is in a position to give gifts to his church.

And yet his ascent into heaven does not remove Christ from the earth, for Paul says he ascended, *ἵνα πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα*, in order to fill all things, the entire universe. Though *πληρώω* can mean "to fulfill" in the sense of bringing prophecy to fulfillment, e.g. Mt 1:21, that meaning does not fit with the context here.

The words 'descended,' namely, from heaven, and, again, 'ascended far above all heavens,' that is, above all that is created, for the purpose of filling *τὰ πάντα* (the universe) refer neither to the prophecies nor to Christ's work of redemption, but to His relation to the universe.^{xxxviii}

Nor do the words "to fill all things" refer to a filling of the universe by Christ's sustaining and operative rule as opposed to an actual presence, or with his gifts as opposed to his body. For in this passage Paul teaches that Christ who descended from heaven and ascended into heaven fills the universe, in other words, omnipresence, or the repletive presence of the Son of God is here predicated of his human nature, Prof. Habeck writes:

This truth...is a thorn in the flesh for those who insist that God does not want us to believe anything that reason cannot comprehend. But for believers Jesus' omnipresence is the guarantee that he is keeping his promise, "I am with you always" (Mt 28:20).^{xxxix}

What is true of "all things," i.e. that Christ fills them, is especially true of the church (Eph 1:23), and the evidence of Christ's presence in and with his church to the gifts he gives to his church.

11 καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφῆτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους,

And he himself gave on the one hand the apostles and the prophets, the evangelists and the pastors who are also teachers.

In this verse St. Paul enumerates some of the gifts of the ascended Christ to his church. Gift lists are also found in Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, where St. Paul mentions such gifts as healing, miracles, tongues and prophecy. Here, however, St. Paul speaks not of special gifts given to people in the church but of people who are gifts to the church. Paul emphasizes that the people listed are Christ's gifts to his church when he writes, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν, and he, he gave, τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, the apostles. Though an apostle is actually anyone who is formally commissioned, or sent out (cf. Barnabas in Acts 14:14), Paul is no doubt thinking of the Twelve, himself and perhaps James, the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19). The Apostles were eye- and ear-witnesses of the public ministry of Jesus from the baptism of John to the ascension (Acts 1:21,22). They were men who had received an immediate or direct call from the Lord, and to whom the Lord had given the gift of inspiration (Jn 14:26). Thus they, along with the Old Testament prophets formed the foundation of the church, which is built on the "foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20). And they continue to be a blessing to us, since like the believers in the early church, we devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

Christ also gave τοὺς δὲ προφῆτας, the prophets, some to expound God's will to God's people. These New Testament prophets were men who, "in the days before the completion of the New Testament, would from time to time receive messages from the Holy Spirit that were to be transmitted to the church."^{xi} One of these prophets was a man named Agabus who predicted the severe famine in the Roman world (Acts 11:28) and the imprisonment of Paul (Acts 21:11). Judas and Silas are also called prophets (Acts 15:32). Whether all the New Testament prophets received revelations regarding the future is not certain. From 1 Corinthians 14 it seems that the prophets in Corinth expounded the Word of God.

Another of Christ's gifts to his church were τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, the evangelists, the "bringers of good news." Only one man is referred to as an evangelist in the New Testament—Philip in Acts 21:8. Because he did mission work in Samaria, baptized the Ethiopian on the road south from Jerusalem to Gaza, and preached the gospel in the cities along the coast from Azotus to Caesarea, it is supposed that the evangelists were travelling missionaries who, like the apostles, did pioneer work in spreading the gospel.

Last in Paul's list of gifts from Christ to his church are τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, the pastors who are also teachers, teaching pastors or pastors/teachers. While it might appear that Paul speaks of two different gifts of Christ to the church here, it seems from the fact that διδασκάλους has no separate article that Paul is describing only one category. One person who performed both functions, shepherding the flock and teaching it. Prof. Valleskey says, "The office of pastor/teacher is, it appears, the closest to that of our pastor today."^{xii} ποιμένας probably refers to the "shepherding" activity of the pastor as he applies God's word to the individual members of the congregation, while διδασκάλους refers to their public activity as teachers and preachers. This is not to say that today's teachers are not a gift of God to his church. A comparison with 1 Corinthians 12:28: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those have gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration and those speaking in different kinds of tongues," indicates that Paul did not intend to give an exhaustive list of Christ's

gifts to the church. Rather we may conclude that forms of the public ministry differ according to the needs of the church at a given time and place. “The observation is true that the gospel creates its own forms as circumstances require.”^{xlii}

Let us note, however, that public ministers of the gospel (those who minister in the name of and on behalf of a group of Christians) are Christ’s own gifts to his church. The public ministry (ministry in the name of and on behalf of a group of Christians) did not develop in the church merely by expediency, but it is a divine institution.

Though one will search in vain for a direct word of institution for the public ministry as, e.g., for baptism, the Scriptures assume the existence of what we have come to call the public ministry. The need for a call (Ro 10:15), the listing of qualifications (I Tim 3; Ti 1), the Lord’s command “that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:16; cf. also 1 Tm 5:18), the counsel to honor and obey one’s spiritual leaders (He 13:7,17), the Pauline example of appointing elders (Acts 14:23), the Pauline command to Titus to appoint elders (Ti 1:5), all of these make it clear that the public ministry is God’s will for his church.^{xliii}

Thus while the forms of the public ministry may change, the office of the ministry of the Word is a divine institution established by Christ for the purpose of building up his church. This is worth keeping in mind especially nowadays when there is much concern about our churches being “clergy-oriented.” We would have to be embarrassed by this charge only if our “clergy” have decided they have more important things to do than work with the Word of God. Otherwise, if our “clergy” faithfully preach and teach the Word, and if we believe that faith comes from hearing the message and, with Luther, we believe that faith is “a living, efficacious, energetic power...that cannot exist without always producing good works,” it goes without saying that we will accord the public ministry of the Word preeminence in our church.

12 πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

For the equipping of the believers for service work, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Paul now states the purpose for which Christ gave his church apostles, prophets, evangelists and teaching pastors: πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων, for the equipping, strengthening, or preparing of the saints, the believers. The ἅγιοι are all Christians, all those who have been called into the church, for each of them has by faith been washed, and sanctified, and justified, so that in God’s eyes they are without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless. καταρτισμὸν has in it the idea of making fit or suitable, restoring to a former condition, completing, putting in order, or equipping. It is used of mending torn fishing nets (Mt 4:21), and of restoring those who have sinned. The equipping or preparing of these saints is one way of describing the work of the public ministry. Note, however, that Scripture also and more often speaks of the function of the pastoral ministry in terms of shepherding: feeding (Acts 20:28), tending (Jn 21:15-11), watching over (Heb 13:17) and preaching (2 Tim 4:2). The ultimate concern of public ministers of the Word must always remain the eternal salvation of the souls entrusted to their care. Thus St. Paul writes to Timothy: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:16).

St. Paul does not say how this equipping or preparing is done. Instead he goes on to say for what they are to be equipped. It is interesting to note, however, that in 2 Timothy 3:16,17 Paul uses the root of καταρτισμὸν twice when he writes: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for pointing out error, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the person who belongs to God is ready (Gk. ἄρτιος), equipped (Gk. ἐξηρητισμένος) for every good work” (NET). From this it is evident that the teaching pastor does

his work of equipping the saints primarily when he teaches and preaches the Word of God. It's not surprising, then, that Paul's next words to Timothy contain a solemn charge to "Preach the Word (2 Tim 4: 2)."

Prof. Schuetze says:

How is he [the pastor] to do this [equip the saints]? Scripture gives no detailed directives, except that it bids him teach, preach, feed, instruct, reprove, rebuke, warn, etc., with the Word of God. As he carries out this primary function he is at the same time equipping the saints for their ministry as universal priests. It is our conviction that the more faithfully Christians attend divine services and hear good sermons that present the whole counsel of God, and the more they read their Bibles and attend Bible classes, the better they will be equipped to function as priests in the many and varied situations that confront them in their stations in life. The Holy Spirit is powerfully active through this Word and will inspire and equip as only He can. To feed is also to equip.^{xliv}

The next phrase *εἰς ἔργον διακονίας*, for service work, active service or works of service, expresses the goal of this equipping. The meaning of this phrase was obscured for many years by the misplaced comma of the KJV which reads here: "He gave some ... pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, etc." The comma between "saints" and "for" makes it seem as if the pastor's call is to perfect (equip) the saints and do the work of the ministry. This translation failed to take into account that the Greek prepositions in the three phrases of this verse are not the same in all three instances. The first is *πρὸς*, the other two are *εἰς*. The KJV makes the three prepositions coordinate, when, in fact, they are subordinate. Prof. Meyer says, "The first expresses direction and aim: 'toward'; the second and third, relation: 'with respect to.' In this manner each succeeding phrase modifies the foregoing."^{xlv} The NIV translation: "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up," correctly combines the first two phrases so that "works of service" refers to God's people and not to the public ministers. Although one commentator exults that this change removes "the aristocratic-clerical and the triumphalistic-ecclesiastical exposition" of the text, it is not really a new insight. Luther's translation is similar to the NIV, as was the Vulgate.

Prof. Meyer comments on the phrase *ἔργον διακονίας*:

Note the absence of the definite article in the Greek, the two nouns thus stressing a quality rather than any definite form. The two terms really express but one compound concept, that of "service work."—The ministry for which each saint is to be thoroughly equipped here naturally does not refer to the pastoral office as such, but denotes spiritual service which one saint renders to the other. The addition of the word 'work' stresses the actual performance of such service.^{xlvi}

And Prof. Habec reminds us that it is not necessary to go to great lengths provide opportunities for God's people to participate in service work:

Each saint will function in keeping with the measure of grace Christ has given him. This implies individuality and spontaneity. No elaborate organizational set up is needed before the saints can function. Saints who have learned underlying principles from their spiritual leaders will be alert for opportunities to serve and make the most of them.^{xlvii}

The purpose this service work is to achieve *εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, for the edifying, the building up of the body of Christ, the church.

The thought is this: to every one of us as the saints who form the *Una Sancta* Christ gave some as apostles, some as prophets, etc., for the purpose of providing the necessary equipment for all

to engage in the blessed task of ministering to each other so as to upbuild his body, the church itself. *οικοδομή* is spiritual edification which consists of everything that develops our spiritual life. Paul is offering a wealth of the equipment that is useful for this work in this very epistle.^{xlviii}

Since Paul himself will explain in the next verse that he means upbuilding in faith and knowledge on the part of those who are members of the body of Christ, and not numerical growth in the church, we don't have to spend time or energy trying to identify what he means by "upbuilding." The desire and responsibility of every saint for numerical growth of the church is amply emphasized by Paul and Christ in other places, but that is not the particular emphasis here. Here the role of each believer in building up his fellow believers in faith and knowledge is under consideration.

What this involves on the part of believers Prof. Schuetze explains when he writes that the believers

are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Th 5:17); "in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" they will let their "requests be made known unto God" (Php 4:6). They will "confess their faults to one another" and "Pray for one another" for spiritual healing (Jas. 5:16). They will "bear one another's burdens" (Ga 6:2); they will visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction (Jas. 1:27). As parents they will bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). As husbands they will love their wives as Christ loved the church, and as wives they will submit themselves to their own husbands as to the Lord (Eph 5:22-25). As workers they will carry out their duties with singleness of heart as unto Christ (Eph 6:5). They will be witnesses of Christ wherever they are. Like the shepherds of Bethlehem they will make known what they know about the Christchild (Lk 2). Like Andrew and Philip they will speak of the Savior to their relatives and friends and bring them to Christ (Jn 2). When scattered abroad they will go everywhere preaching the Word (Ac 8:4). Indeed, whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, they will do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). What a busy service it is to be one who belongs to God's chosen people, to be a priest and king who brings spiritual sacrifices and shows forth his praises.^{xlix}

Notice that Prof. Schuetze speaks of the saints and their service here in terms of the universal priesthood in distinction from those who serve in the public ministry in v. 11. This is a most important distinction to maintain in order to avoid confusion in the church. Luther expresses that distinction in this way: "The preaching office (public ministry) is simply a public service which is conferred on someone by the entire congregation, all the members of which are priests." If the "service work" for which believers are to be equipped is understood to be public ministry (ministry in the name of and on behalf of the congregation), you necessarily arrive at the conclusion that every Christian is supposed to be involved in some way in some form of public ministry. "No exception is allowed by the term (saints) and especially not in light of the terms 'each' and 'all' which occur again and again in these verses."^{li} The fact is, however, that "not all who possess the universal priesthood possess the qualifications for the public ministry, which God has established for the welfare of his church."^{lii}

Now it is true that those who are called into the public ministry often do equip saints to serve with them in the public ministry. Paul clearly instructed Timothy to do this when he wrote: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2). We have been doing this with Sunday School teachers and elders who visit inactive members for many years. And yet, when those who are qualified for these positions of public service in the congregation are called and equipped for those offices, they are no longer functioning as members of the universal priesthood, but now they are serving as public ministers—though it may be only in a limited way. They now belong to v.11's list of gifts of Christ to his church, and they are themselves now "equippers of the saints." It is finally the church's call, not a Seminary diploma that sets those who are in public ministry apart from the general priesthood of all baptized Christians. So when the church has need and enlists lay people for service in the name of and on behalf of the congregation, they are no longer simply carrying out their universal priesthood, but are

functioning in the public ministry. Remember, too, that the Gospel will create these forms. Let's be sure that our own ideas about what will be good for the sanctification of God's people don't lead us to establish forms merely for the sake of creating a sense of ownership or importance. Prof. Dobberstein writes:

Nor do we ever want lay involvement to become a kind of gimmick—keep them busy so that they will remain loyal to the cause. A church can be busy, busy, busy and still not be meeting the real needs for ministry within its midst, in the community and throughout the world. Feelings of busyness and importance are no substitute for service which is motivated purely by love for the Savior.^{liii}

But why stress the distinction between the two ways God's people may serve the Savior? Is there any practical purpose to it? Prof. Schuetze answers:

Failure to make this distinction may lead to the false conclusion that God's priests who are not serving the congregation in some direct manner are failing in their ministry, or that the ministry carried out within the congregation is of a higher order than what is done in God's service in one's personal life. Consequently the universal priesthood loses its significance through such emphasis.^{liv}

There is a danger of falling back into Rome's distinction between the temporal and spiritual estates, and giving the impression that any service that is not formal service in the church is somehow second-rate service. But hear Luther:

The idea that the service to God should have to do only with a church, altar, singing, reading, sacrifice, and the like is without a doubt but the worst trick of the devil. How could the devil have led us more effectively astray than by the narrow conception that service to God takes place only in church and by works done therein ... The whole world could abound with services to the Lord—not only in churches but also in the home, kitchen, workshop, field.^{lv}

Again Luther writes:

When a father goes ahead and washes diapers...and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool...God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because the father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.^{lvi}

Let's be careful not to give the impression that "God's priests who are not serving the congregation in some direct manner are failing in their ministry, or that the ministry carried out within the congregation is of a higher order than what is done in God's service in one's personal life."

This brings us to the word *διακονίας*, service or ministry. It is a word which covers a wide variety of forms of service. Martha was distracted by all the *διακονίαν*, the serving, she had to do when Jesus came to her home (Lk 10:40). The offerings given to help the needy in Jerusalem are described as the *διακονία*, the service that supplies the needs of God's people (II Cor 9:12). Likewise the work of the apostles is described as the *διακονία*, ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). The NIV and NET appear to be quite consistent in translating the word *διακονία* as "ministry" when it describes the work of those who work with the Word of God, and "service" when it describes Christian works of charity and relief which do not involve the administration of the means of grace. I believe that this is a distinction that we would be wise to follow. It also seems to me that we would avoid confusion by using the term "ministry" only to refer to that service which involves the word and is rendered in the name of and on behalf of other believers—"public ministry," and refer to the "service work" done by believers in their daily lives as "personal service." When it comes to keeping the unity of the Spirit, we

do well to remember that even the language we use is important. And when one or the other of us starts to speak a “new” language it can make working together as one somewhat difficult. Read the Tower of Babel account to verify this.

I understand the fear of some that this seems to place the work of public ministers on a different (perhaps higher) level than the service of the saints, as if the one has more value than the other. Certainly there is no difference in value. Whether one is serving as a public minister in response to the church’s call or on his own initiative as a member of the universal priesthood, that service is a holy and pleasing sacrifice to God (1 Pet 2:5). But I would suggest that to make everyone a “minister” deprecates the universal priesthood by making it seem that in the past only “the Minister,” the pastor, was actually rendering any kind of acceptable service to God. Is the service of the saints any more pleasing to God because now it is called ministry and the saints are called ministers? Are we hoping to make our people feel more like “somebody” with this terminology? Are we hoping that people will be more apt to serve because now they are ministers? This is not to say that this is a wrong use of the word “minister.” We have complete freedom under the new covenant. However, though everything is permissible “not everything is beneficial,” nor is everything that is permissible “constructive.” We could also speak of the Lord’s Supper as the “Eucharist.” But would it be beneficial? Or of Mary as the “mother of God.” But would that be constructive? It is interesting that at the time of the Reformation Luther objected to Rome’s use of the term “priest” for those who work with Word and Sacrament in the public ministry. Prof Schuetze writes:

To avoid confusion (with the priesthood of believers) Luther advises against using the name of priest for the church’s public Ministers. He writes, “According to the New Testament Scriptures better names would be ministers, deacons, bishops, stewards, presbyters.”^{lvii}

It would seem that Luther’s concern for confusion should also apply in the other direction, and that we would want to avoid confusing the priesthood of believers with the public ministry. Wouldn’t it be wise, then, to describe the service of the saints with a term other than “ministry” since that term has long been associated with those who publicly work with the means of grace?

While it is probably a little strong to say that “Identifying the priesthood of believers with ‘everyone a minister’ wreaks havoc in the church and produces theological mischief,” (George Wollenburg in *Christian News*), the present confusion in our midst about what the public ministry is and isn’t and who is in it and who isn’t, is not cleared up by labeling everyone a minister, though that may be entirely permissible. The fact is that Christ instituted only one office of the public ministry—the ministry of the Word. This by itself indicates that the work of public ministers of the Word, though not more precious in the eyes of God, is different from the work done by those who serve without the Word in the name of and on the behalf of believers, such as Ministers of Administration, and the personal service of the saints. It would be unfortunate if the ministry of the Word in our churches eventually came to be looked upon merely as one ministry among many, on a level with administration, social work and charity. There was a time when “the ministry” meant serving as a pastor, teacher or professor—working with the Word. People knew what it meant to be in the ministry. I don’t think that’s true any more. I believe it has confused things more than a little to call everyone a minister and to refer to all service as ministry.

If this sounds like someone trying to protect his turf by jealously guarding all ministry and quashing all lay initiatives, be assured that it is not. It is only a concern that we do not diminish respect for the public ministry of the Word which alone is divinely instituted, and lose sight of the fact that “the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided, and strengthened by it” (LW 40:37). It would appear that others share this concern. Prof. Brug writes:

If we are going to use “ministry” in this wider sense, (everyone a minister) a number of cautions are necessary. Since the wider usage of “ministry” is called archaic (outdated) by the dictionary,

to avoid confusion we must make it clear to our hearers that we are returning to a wider usage of the term “minister” than that which has been common in the recent past. We must be careful that we do not confuse the service which Christians do on their own initiative as part of the priesthood of all believers with the “ministry” which they carry out in response to the church’s call and in the name of the church (public ministry). We must be careful that we do not diminish respect for the pastoral ministry, the most comprehensive form of the public ministry of the Word, which was established by Christ.^{lviii}

This promiscuous use of the word “ministry” in our circles to describe the service of the saints is the more surprising in view of the fact that our WELS Mission Statement lists as Objective #4: “To encourage and equip each other for the application of our faith in lives of Christian service.”

13 μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οί πάντες εις την ένότητα τής πίστewς και τής έπιγνώσεως του υίου του θεου, εις άνδρα τέλειον, εις μέτρον ήλικίας του πληρώματος του Χριστου,

Until we all attain to unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to full height according to the fullness of Christ.

St. Paul now explains the goal toward which the body of Christ is to be built up: *μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οί πάντες εις την ένότητα τής πίστewς και τής έπιγνώσεως του υίου του θεου*, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. *μέχρι* is a particle with the force here of a conjunction which indicates the goal of the building up of the body, the *terminus ad quem*. *καταστήσωμεν* is an aorist subjunctive “used in a temporal clause with a purpose idea” from *καταστάω*, to come down to the goal, to arrive at or attain to. The stated goal is *εις την ένότητα τής πίστewς και τής έπιγνώσεως του υίου του θεου*, to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

In v.5 St. Paul had mentioned “one faith,” saving faith as one aspect of the unity the members of Christ’s body already enjoyed. Thus it is a little difficult to understand why *ένότητα τής πίστewς*, unity of faith should be a goal toward which the members of the body should strive. We therefore understand St. Paul to be talking here about Christian faith, (also called “general” faith) faith which is broader than saving faith. Theodore Laetsch talks about saving faith and Christian faith when he writes:

The most precious promise and the only saving promise is the Gospel truth, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” To accept this Gospel, to put one’s trust in this divine promise, to rely for salvation solely on Jesus Christ, that, and that alone, is saving faith. Yet that is not the whole of Christian faith. The faith of a Christian in its totality comprises trust not only in the saving Gospel truths. Christian faith makes God’s Word the only rule and norm of its entire life and conduct.^{lix}

Prof. Habeck says, “The store of truth the Lord has revealed is vast. But no matter what detail came into consideration, the ideal was that no one questions it or rejects it but that all accept it wholeheartedly.”^{lx} A second goal of the building up of the body of Christ is unity *τής έπιγνώσεως του υίου του θεου*, in the knowledge of the Son of God. “So much is revealed about Jesus that the saints will have to work until their dying day to help one another discover all that is revealed and to accept it fully, to reach the oneness of the knowledge of the Son of God.”^{lxi}

Paul further defines the goal of the building up of the body of Christ with two prepositional phrases. He writes *εις άνδρα τέλειον*, toward the mature, the full grown man. *τέλειον* means that which has reached the set goal, complete or mature. The KJV translation, “unto a perfect man” introduced a note of perfectionism, and could be understood to mean that Paul is teaching that here on earth we can achieve the holiness and perfection that God requires. What Paul actually has in mind is a full-grown, fully developed, mature man, the opposite of

what he will call *νήπιοι*, children, in the next verse. He speaks in much the same language in 1 Corinthians 14:20 when he says, “Fellow Christians, do not be childish in the use of your minds. In evil be babies, but in the use of your minds be mature” (Gk. *τέλειοι*). Paul also uses a similar illustration in 1 Corinthians 13:11, where he writes: “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.” The idea is that we should no longer be childish in our faith, but move from milk to solid food, from the elementary teachings about Christ to maturity (Hebrews 5:13-6:1). The means by which this growth to maturity takes place, though not indicated directly, is clearly the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, which Christ’s gifts to his church use to equip the believers for work in Christ’s service, and which the saints use in their service to one another.

The idea of spiritual growth to maturity is further defined by the words *εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, toward full, that is, required or due height according to the fullness of Christ. *ἡλικία* is age or full age but is also used to describe height, as in Lk 19:3 where Zacchaeus is described as *ἡλικία μικρός*. If we understand the previous phrase to have described the inner, spiritual maturity of the members of the body, then this phrase would add the corresponding thought of the growth of the members of the body in size and stature. This growth takes place *τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, according to the fullness of Christ. *πλήρωμα* is either that which is filled or that which fills. The genitive simply shows a relationship between the growth and the fullness, that is, the being filled with Christ. We understand Paul to say that to the extent that the members of the body are filled with Christ, with his words and promises, with his grace and love, and with the wisdom and strength he gives, the members of the body grow toward full height. Jesus said something similar to this when he told his disciples: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). And St. Paul prayed for the Christians in Philippi that they would be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ Jesus—to the glory and praise of God” (Php 1:11). Meyer explains the fullness of Christ to be “everything that the descending and ascending Christ procured for us.”^{lxii} While this goal of full growth in “wisdom and stature” by the members of the body will not be fully realized in this life, it must still be the objective toward which pastors and teachers strive in their preaching and teaching, and toward which the believers strive in their spiritual service toward one another.

Note that the building up of the body toward unity happens when *οἱ πάντες*, all the members of the body make spiritual progress. Prof. Meyer says,

The building of the body of Christ, which is the church, is achieved only by the advancement of the individual members. As grows the individual in faith, in knowledge, in understanding, in sanctification; so grows the church. Only so....The oneness in these two basic factors of church life is the goal toward which we are working. There will always be novices in the church—just think of our children—who need tender and most careful coaching. It is the business of every saint, assigned to him, and gladly accepted by him, in the very act that created him a saint, for the carrying out of which business he is being thoroughly equipped by the several gifts of the exalted Christ.^{lxiii}

Paul even includes himself when he says “we all.” Great man of God that he was, the Apostle never considered himself to have reached perfection. He wrote to the Philippians: “I want to know Christ ... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” St. Paul now indicates that there is a very practical purpose for striving toward unity in faith and knowledge and spiritual maturity.

14 ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδείαν τῆς πλάνης,

So that we may no longer be infants, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of teaching from men who operate in deception and craftiness according to the scheming of error.

What St. Paul had just put in positive terms, being built up toward unity and spiritual maturity, he now puts in negative terms when he says *ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι*, that we may no longer be infants. *νήπιοι* refers to the immaturity of children in contrast to the maturity of adults. It is true that Christ said, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3). Children are indeed an example for adults in their humility and unquestioning confidence in the Word of God, but while the Lord looks for childlike faith from every Christian he wants them to put away childish understanding. So St. Peter also writes, “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2).

Why it is so important to put away childish immaturity St. Paul indicates with the words *κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας*, tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of teaching. *κλυδωνιζόμενοι* means to be driven or agitated by waves, from *κλύδων*, a dashing or surging wave. *περιφερόμενοι* is to be carried about or borne back and forth, from *περί*, around or about, and *φέρω*, to carry. Here both terms are used metaphorically to describe an agitated or unsettled state of mind caused by *παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας*, every wind of teaching. The winds that whip up and unsettle the spiritually immature Christian are *διδασκαλίας*, teachings, doctrine. That false doctrine is meant is clear from Paul’s words *ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης*, in the deception and craftiness of men according to the trickiness of error. *κυβεία* (our word “cube”) is literally dice playing, and then wicked dice playing and intentional fraud. *ἐν* expresses the evil atmosphere “in” which the winds of doctrine exist. That “sphere” is further described as *πανουργία*, cleverness or trickery. *τῶν ἀνθρώπων*, the men who operate in the sphere of deception and craftiness work, in a manner that is *πρὸς*, consistent with or “according to” (Thayer *τὴν μεθοδεῖαν τῆς πλάνης*, the method of error or the scheming of deception. Others take *πρὸς* in the sense of “with a view to” or “tending to” (Expositor’s) and translate as does the NET: “clever scheming to lead us astray.”

In either case, Paul paints an alarming picture of false teachers and the danger of their false teachings. He describes them as toying with sacred things, as playing fast and loose with the teachings of Scripture. They do not tremble at God’s Word or stand in awe of his Law. They know all the tricks and will resort to deception to defend their false doctrine. Thus it has always been with the errors that threaten every Christian, especially those who are spiritual children, for those errors are “the devil’s schemes” (Eph 6:11). No wonder then that Jesus warned: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves” (Mt 7:15). And St. Paul wrote: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught” (Col 2:6,7).

Error always operates with tricky expertness. It uses Bible passages (apparently according to their real meaning) and reasonings (apparently sound) and thus easily fools the “infants” in Christian faith and knowledge, who have not yet grown up to Christian manhood and the age-measure of the fullness of Christ.^{lxiv}

An important part of the responsibilities of public ministers of the Word is to identify false teachers and their lies. Thus, St. Paul writes to Titus, “(An overseer) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). In this way he will equip God’s people to stand firmly on God’s truth against the deadly lies of unbelief. This is a serious responsibility, to point out danger when it approaches God’s people, and the watchman who fails to sound the warning will be held accountable for the blood of those who fall prey to false teachers (Ez 3:17-21). No wonder Paul warns Timothy: “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.” And James says: “Not many of

you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (3:1).

15 ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός,

But speaking the truth in love, we grow up into him in all things, who is the head, Christ.

A further result of growing toward spiritual maturity is that instead of being swept hither and yon by false teaching, which would disrupt the unity of the body, that unity will be fostered and promoted. Paul explains ἀληθεύοντες δὲ ἐν ἀγάπῃ, instead, professing the truth in love. ἀληθεύοντες is to be truthful, to tell the truth or deal truthfully. This is the counterpart to the warning against false teachers and their deceptive lies—continue (the present participle denotes ongoing action) to confess the truth, meditate on it, absorb it and proclaim it. “The truth, God’s truth, i.e., the truth of the Gospel, is the only thing that can achieve the blessed end mentioned in this verse. It is a power of God, the only power that we have, unto salvation.”^{lxv} Stoeckhardt says that if Paul had said:

Christians ... being established and grounded in the truth should resist and reject error. This would be an adequate contrast to “that we henceforth be no more children.” However, the following, “but speaking the truth in love,” etc. goes beyond the contrast. Christians should also themselves—for this reason Christ gave his church teachers, who instruct and qualify them thereby, to speak, confess and defend the truth.^{lxvi}

This encouragement calls to mind the words of St. Peter: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (1 Peter 3:15).” And as St. Peter urges that this answer be given “with gentleness and respect,” so Paul says speak the truth ἐν ἀγάπῃ, in love.

Because of the perversity of our sinful human nature we are tempted to project the image of superiority, to be patronizing or to be impatient when we share the truth with others. But God would have us be eager to help others and to share with them what we have found in the Word, so that they might share in the wisdom and joy we have been permitted to find.^{lxvii}

And yet as Prof. Meyer points out, “This is a love without dissimulation, a two-sided love, which according to Rom. 12:9, abhors that which is evil as well as it cleaves to that which is good.”^{lxviii} Here again is evidence that we are not to ignore dangerous trends that we may see among ourselves or look the other way when we see, errors in doctrine or practice in our midst out of some misguided zeal to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Truth spoken in love may at times have to be truth that points out error, truth that hurts. It’s interesting to note that the only other time the word ἀληθεύω is used St. Paul uses it to ask the Galatians, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth (ἀληθεύων)?” (Gal 4:16). Paul had used the truth to point out the “foolishness” of the Galatians (3:1) and to warn against returning to the errors of the past (4:9). Paul’s example makes it clear that in order to preserve the true unity of the Spirit it may be necessary in love to speak truth that hurts. Such is the nature of love. “Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6).

The result of speaking the truth in love is that αὐξήσωμεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, we will grow up into him in all things, ὅς ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ, Χριστός, the one who is the head, Christ. αὐξήσωμεν is aorist subjunctive with the ἵνα of v.14, to grow or increase, and expresses actual result. This growth is described as being εἰς αὐτὸν τὰ πάντα, into, unto or toward him, to be like him, in all things. To grow εἰς αὐτὸν, literally, into him, presents a rather incongruous picture. A body does not grow into its head. The idea rather is that the end and object of the growth in the members of the body is Christ, the Head of the body. “By using the truth in love we shall grow so that in every respect the body corresponds to the head.”^{lxix} As Jesus urged his disciples to be like him: “Love

each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). And St. Peter wrote: “To this you were called (to suffer injustice with patience), because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his footsteps” (1 Pet 2:21). And Paul urged Christians to be like Christ by “living a life of love” (Eph 5:1), and by adopting his attitude of humility and unselfish service to others (Php 2:5). So here he says that using the truth in love will result in the members of the body of Christ growing up to be like Christ, the head of the body. It is along these lines that Luther speaks of the Christian becoming a Christ to his neighbor: “Surely we are named after Christ, not because he is absent from us, but because he dwells in us, that is, because we believe in him and are Christs one to another and do to our neighbors as Christ does to us.”^{lxix} Note the two sources of this growth in likeness to Christ—the truth and love. And remember how Jesus described the relationship between the two: “if you obey my commands you will remain in my love” (Jn 15:10).

In 1912 the *Theologische Quartalschrift* published a sermon outline by Adolph Hoenecke based on this verse and the next one. The theme of the sermon: “The True Growth of a Congregation.” In the first part he shows that true growth is “Growth in Sanctification,” and says that this means growth:

1. In love and all other things in which Christ sets us an example.
2. So that the members more and more resemble the Head.
3. Mere growth in numbers without true likeness to the Head is not true growth.

16 ἐξ οὗ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ.

From whom the whole body, joined and held together by the support of every joint, according to the working in measure of each individual part, produces the growth of the body—unto building itself up, in love.

But Christ is not only the One unto whom every Christian grows, he is also the one from whom the entire church grows. Paul points us once more to Christ, the head of the body and says, ἐξ οὗ, from whom, πᾶν τὸ σῶμα συναρμολογούμενον καὶ συμβιβαζόμενον διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας, the whole body is joined and held together by the supply of every joint. Paul has spoken at some length about the members of the body, οἱ πάντες, in v.13. Now he looks at πᾶν τὸ σῶμα, the whole body in its relationship to Christ, and all the members in their relationship to the head. That relationship is this, that from Christ the whole body is συναρμολογούμενον, joined or fit together (note our word “harmony”), and συμβιβαζόμενον, united, put or held together. The present participles express an ongoing process. This process has its source in Christ, but is carried out διὰ πάσης ἀφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας, by the support or supply of every joint. ἀφῆς is a joint, ligament or a connection. The word is also used in Col 2:19 where Paul writes that “the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments (ἀφῶν) and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας is the supply or supplying, support or service (Stoekhardt). “The connotation is generous abundance freely supplied.”^{lxxi} The NIV combines the two words to get “supporting ligament.” This, however, misses the definite article τῆς, which points to that particular “supply” that comes from Christ.

The idea, therefore, appears to be that the body is fitly framed and knit together by means of the joints, every one of them in its own place and function, as the points of connection between member and member and the points of communication between the different parts and the supply that comes from the head.^{lxxii}

In other words, each part of the body, every joint, supplies its share to the growth of the body, and this occurs as each part maintains its connection with the head, Christ, the source of growth and strength.

Hoenecke summarized this portion of verse 16 in the second part of his outline and points to Christ as the source of all true church growth. In part II, which is entitled “Growth in Faith comes from Christ,” he writes:

1. The church receives its growth from Christ and is a united church.
2. But only through faith does it receive its growth from Christ.
3. A mere outward likeness to Christ, without this faith-engendered growth, which comes from Christ, is not true growth.

This growth in faith will lead to growth *κατ’ ἐνέργειαν ἐν μέτρῳ ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους*, according to the working in measure of each part, or “to the extent that each and every part is doing its job” (NET). *ἐνέργειαν* is energy, in the sense of activity, working or function. *ἐν μέτρῳ*, in keeping with or proportionate to, *ἐνὸς ἐκάστου μέρους* (the working) of every single part or member points back to v.7, where the Apostle said “to each one grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Every single part of the body contributes in proportion to the gifts it has received from Christ. And as each part is active to the degree it has received the ability to contribute, *τὴν αὐξήσιν τοῦ σώματος ποιεῖται*, it produces the growth of the body. *αὐξήσιν* is growth. *ποιεῖται* is a present middle indicative to indicate that as its parts remain in contact with Christ, the head, by and for itself the body produces its growth. The result of this growing process within the body is *εἰς οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ*, unto the building up of itself. *εἰς* expresses the goal of the continuing growth of the body, namely, *οἰκοδομὴν ἑαυτοῦ*, its upbuilding. Paul has previously described this upbuilding in terms of reaching unity in faith and knowledge, becoming mature. Once again the point is made that the church grows as the individual members grow.

Prof. Meyer boils this rather difficult passage down very nicely when he says:

The principal clause is: the whole body produces the growth of the body ... Each part of the body, according to the gift bestowed on it by the head, contributes its particular share—great or small, yet essential—to the growth of the body.^{lxxiii}

And Stoeckhardt says:

The apostle means that with every individual Christian rightly using his peculiar God-given gifts to the service of others, the whole is benefited ... The growth of the whole body takes place according to the measure of activity that every individual part performs according to his peculiar measure of Christ’s gift. Not only the teachers of the Church, by performing their office, promote the growth of Christ’s body, but all members of the Church contribute thereto, every one according to the measure of his gift.^{lxxiv}

ἐν ἀγάπῃ expresses the sphere in which all the growth of the members of the body is to take place. As in Romans 12, where Paul finished his discussion of spiritual gifts by urging, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love,” and as he followed 1 Corinthians 12 with an encouragement to follow the more excellent way of love in chapter 13, so now he puts love on the throne as the queen of all virtues and grace. Without love the equipping of the public ministers and the service of the saints will be worthless in God’s sight (1 Cor 13:1-3). And without love to serve as the glue which holds the members of the body together, the body will be torn apart by envy and strife. Thus St. Paul says here more briefly what he wrote to the church in Colosse: “Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” This, of course, brings us back again to the Head, to Christ. For St. John says: “Love comes from God” (1 John 4:7). And Jesus directs us to the means by which God works his love in us when he says: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (Jn

15:10). Prof. Meyer writes, “The church is a wonderful living organism! And the life stream, coming from its Head, pulsating through its veins, is love, intelligent, purposeful love” (p.230).

Hoenecke summarized this part of v.16 in part III of his outline in which he shows that true church growth is “Growth in Zeal for the Right Preaching of Christ.” He writes:

1. Every member should help the body grow for its (the body’s) self-improvement.
2. But it is the right preaching about Christ which produces the true sanctification and right faith which effect improvement and maintenance of the body.
3. So it is not true growth, where zeal for right preaching is not present. There may be many other things in which one might see improvement: Promoting “great things,” etc., but if there is not constant zeal for right preaching, if teaching and admonishing are not furthered and strengthened, then it is only the appearance of growth. Everything comes through the Word.

That’s the way it is in the Body of Christ—”Everything comes through the Word.” True unity in the Body is created and preserved by the Word. Growth to maturity among the members comes through the Word. To the end that true unity and growth to maturity might be achieved in the Body by the Word, Christ gave gifts to the members. Among those gifts are those who serve as public ministers of the Word in the Church. Let them faithfully preach and teach that Word in its truth and purity. In so doing, they will be equipping the saints to use their various gifts to serve in their high calling as members of the universal priesthood of believers. Everything comes through the Word. As public ministers of the Word lead God’s into the Word and feed them with the Word, as God’s people grow to maturity in their faith and knowledge of Christ through the Word, they will grow in likeness to Christ and in service to their Savior and to one another. As we consider our calling—that we are members of one Body, called to live together in unity and to grow together toward maturity—let’s always remember, “Everything comes through the Word.”

God grant our church shepherds who faithfully feed the church which the Savior purchased with his blood, who preach and teach, who edify the saints by means of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, shepherds who will also equip the sheep and lambs of God’s flock for service as needed.

God grant our church people who are richly nourished by the spiritual food God has provided, who through it become strong to serve as saints of God wherever they are and in whatever they may be doing, who bear witness to Christ in word and deed, and who follow the call of the church to serve publicly according to its needs and direction.^{lxxv}

Endnotes

ⁱ E.E. Kowalke, *Ephesians 4: 1-6* (Milwaukee: NPH, 1953) p. 10.

ⁱⁱ Martin Luther, quoted in C.F.W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* (St. Louis: CPH, 1987) p. 70.

ⁱⁱⁱ S.D.F. Salmond, *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 320.

^{iv} Kowalke, op. cit. p. 12.

^v Joh. Ph. Meyer, “Remarks on Eph. 4, 1-16,” *Theologische Quartalschrift*, (Vol. 41, Oct. 1944) p. 219.

^{vi} Salmond, op. cit. p. 12.

^{vii} Edward W.A. Koehler, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine* (St. Louis: CPH, 1971) p. 240.

^{viii} George Stoeckhardt, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Fort Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1951) p. 71.

^{ix} Kowalke, op. cit. p. 17

^x Ibid, p. 17.

^{xi} Commission on Doctrinal Matters, *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod* (1970) pp. 43, 44.

^{xii} Hermann Sasse, quoted in *The Way to Lutheran Unity* (Milwaukee: NPH, 1972) p. 132.

^{xiii} Irwin Habeck, *Ephesians: Amazing Grace* (Milwaukee, NPH, 1985) p. 77.

- ^{xiv} Stoeckhardt, op. cit. p. 72.
- ^{xv} R.C.H. Lenski, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962), p. 510.
- ^{xvi} WELS Doctrinal Statement, p. 17.
- ^{xvii} Kowalke, op. cit. p. 14.
- ^{xviii} WELS Doctrinal Statement, p. 17.
- ^{xix} Armin Panning, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, (Vol. 60, No. 13), p. 200.
- ^{xx} Lenski, op. cit. pp. 515, 516.
- ^{xxi} Kowalke, op. cit. p. 15.
- ^{xxii} Habeck, op. cit. p. 80.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid*, p. 80.
- ^{xxiv} Armin Panning, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, (Vol. 60, No. 15) p. 232
- ^{xxv} Salmond, op. cit. p. 323.
- ^{xxvi} John Brug, *Psalms*, Vol. 1 (Milwaukee: NPH, 1989) p. 266.
- ^{xxvii} Meyer, op. cit. p. 222.
- ^{xxviii} Fritz Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982) p. 531.
- ^{xxix} Brug, op. cit. p. 266.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid*, p. 266.
- ^{xxxi} Lenski, op. cit. p. 520.
- ^{xxxii} Meyer, op. cit. p. 223.
- ^{xxxiii} Brug, op. cit. p. 266.
- ^{xxxiv} Meyer, op. cit. p. 223.
- ^{xxxv} John Schaller, *Biblical Christology* (Milwaukee: NPH, 1981) p. 103.
- ^{xxxvi} Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* Vol. II (St. Louis: CPH, 1951) p. 288.
- ^{xxxvii} Schaller, op. cit. p. 109.
- ^{xxxviii} Pieper, op. cit. p. 168.
- ^{xxxix} Habeck, op. cit. p. 82.
- ^{xl} David Valleskey, "Equipping the Believers as Disciples," *Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Biennial Convention of the WELS*, p. 233.
- ^{xli} *Ibid*, p. 234.
- ^{xlii} Habeck, op. cit. p. 84.
- ^{xliii} Valleskey, "Coworking of Pastors, Teachers, Staff, and Member Ministers," presented to WELS Symposium on Ministry, p. 7.
- ^{xliv} Armin Schuetze, "A Shepherd or a Coach?" (*WLQ* Vol. 74, No. 1) p. 8.
- ^{xlv} Meyer, op. cit. p. 226.
- ^{xlvi} *Ibid*, p. 226.
- ^{xlvii} Habeck, op. cit. p. 84.
- ^{xlviii} Lenski, op. cit. p. 531.
- ^{xlix} Schuetze, op. cit. pp. 7, 8.
- ¹ Armin Schuetze, "The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today" (*WLQ*, Vol. 83, No. 2) p. 119.
- ² Norman Berg, "Practicing the Priesthood of All Believers according to Ephesians 4:11-16" p. 4.
- ³ Wilbert Gawrisch, "A Royal Priesthood Proclaiming God's Praise" (*WLQ*, Vol. 75, No. 4) p. 288.
- ⁴ Leroy Dobberstein, "Ministry in the Year 2000 and Beyond," Pastor's Institute lecture, p. 8.
- ⁵ Schuetze, "A Shepherd or A Coach?," p. 10.
- ⁶ Martin Luther quoted in *The Northwestern Lutheran* (Vol. 78) p. 126
- ⁷ Martin Luther quoted in *The Northwestern Lutheran* (Vol. 78) p. 344.
- ⁸ Schuetze, "The Significance of the Reformation for Our Ministry Today," p. 118.
- ⁹ John Brug, *The Northwestern Lutheran* (Vol. 80) p. 68.
- ¹⁰ Theodore Laetsch, "Sermon Study on Romans 14:1-9" (*CTM*, Vol. XIII, No. 10) p. 758.
- ¹¹ Habeck, op. cit. p. 85.
- ¹² *Ibid*, p. 85.
- ¹³ Meyer, op. cit. p. 227.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 227.
- ¹⁵ Lenski, op. cit. p. 541.
- ¹⁶ Meyer, op. cit. p. 228.
- ¹⁷ Stoeckhardt, op. cit. p. 84.
- ¹⁸ Habeck, op. cit. p. 87.
- ¹⁹ Meyer, op. cit. p. 229.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 229.

^{lxx} Martin Luther quoted in “Ministering to God’s Free People” (*WLQ*, Vol. 65, No. 2) p. 152.

^{lxxi} Lenski, op. cit. p. 546.

^{lxxii} Salmond, op. cit. p. 532.

^{lxxiii} Meyer, op. cit. p. 229.

^{lxxiv} Stoeckhardt, op. cit. p. 85.

^{lxxv} Schuetze, “A Shepherd or a Coach?” p. 11.