

VIII. Lesson 8 Unity in the Body of Christ – Ephesians 4:1-16

January 16/17, 2008

Stuart chapter 8

Aim: To grow in maturity and unity in the church.

This epistle like all of Paul's epistles, is divided into two parts. The first three chapters were doctrinal; they were mostly about what we are to believe. We now come to the chapters containing practical advice and application. Because a Christian believes in a certain way, he or she is to behave in a certain way. By using this structure, Paul is telling us that doctrinal 'input' must be matched by equal, practical 'output' of that doctrine in our lives.

We should not therefore assume that Paul is dividing us in two like the Greeks – mind and body. Rather, we should view the first three chapters as truth, which we are to believe whether we understand it or not. These chapters are not simply addressed to the intellect, but to the whole person. Then the effects of those facts are addressed in the last three chapters.

A. Unity in Diversity (Eph. 4:1-6)

Paul is going to build on the foundation he has laid and tell us how to live the Christian life – at church in the world, and at home. The easiest place to live the Christian life is at church, and this is where Paul starts his practical instruction. His particular theme is the unity of the church. If we are being sanctified by Christ, then we should have progressive unity of the church. Does that mean we should have unity with liberals? "Truth before unity!" However, part of the truth *is* unity. We need to affirm the truth of unity.

Paul's point is that we have unity – it is not something we have to earn or bring about. It is something we possess, something we already have. So what do we do about apparent disunity? Well that's something that needs to be overcome progressively in history. And that needs to happen, not by saying we are not united, but by affirming that we are united, and act like it. The church is one; therefore the church should act like one.

1. Fivefold Maturity (4:1-3)

- *Paul specifies five qualities that should characterize a Christian's walk. What are they (4:2-3)?*

a) *Calling (4:1)*

Paul begins this section of Scripture with the word 'therefore' to make the transition from doctrine to practice. Having instructed the Gentiles in the hope of their calling (1:18), he now shifts to how their behavior should reflect this calling. The Greek word for church, *ecclesia*, is made up of a prefix (*ek* – out of), and a root, which is the verb *coleo*, meaning to call. Thus, the church in the New Testament is made up of those who are called out from the world, from darkness, from damnation, from paganism, to become members of the body of Christ. The emphasis is upon what God has done. Because God has set His hand upon us and called us, changing us from what we were into what we have now become, we are to live as Christians in the world.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

The fact that his life in and for Christ had led to imprisonment did not mean that he requested the sympathy of his readers, but it added intensity to his appeal, as now he wished to speak to them concerning the whole manner of their life.

The word *parakalō* can mean ‘exhort’, but obviously in this context has its stronger meaning, ‘beg’ or ‘beseech.’ The link with what precedes is given by the word ‘therefore’ as in Romans 12:1, indicating that Christian conduct follows from Christian doctrine, that the duty of Christians derives directly from the unspeakable debt of gratitude that they owe for all that they have received in Christ. Step by step they are to walk in a direction that corresponds to their call.

Paul wants us to walk worthy of our calling. What is our calling? It is all the stuff in chapters 1-3; it is all these tremendous privileges. You have all these wonderful, high privileges. After God calls us to be His children, and in response to that unspeakable gift, we should endeavor to do everything in our power to live lives that are worthy of our calling. That call to know the grace of God in Christ, to be the children of God, and to serve Him should transform every part of life.

‘Worthy’ means to have worth or value. But it is more than that. It means to have a worth equal to one’s position. A worthy opponent is one whose gifts equal one’s own. A workman ‘worthy of his hire’ is one whose service merits the wages he receives. The Apostle is beseeching them and exhorting them always to give equal weight in their lives to doctrine and practice. They must not put all the weight on doctrine and none on practice; nor all the weight on practice and just a little, if any at all, on doctrine.

Their conduct must be worthy of their calling; their practice equal to their doctrine. Doctrine without practice leads to bitter orthodoxy; it gives correctness of thought without the practical vitality of the life of Christ. Practice without doctrine leads to aberrations; it gives intensity of feeling, but it is feeling apt to go off in any (and often a wrong) direction. What we need is both.

b) Lowliness and Gentleness (4:2a)

Lowliness. To the Greek mind, *tapeinotes* (lowliness or humility) meant a servile attitude no better than the submissiveness displayed by a cowering, ignoble slave. The word Paul uses here is *tapeinophrosunē*, ‘lowliness of mind.’ Lowliness is taking the lowest place with a view to being the servant of all. Humility is the opposite of pride or self-assertion. It was not considered a virtue by the Greeks, but in Christ, ‘lowliness’ became a virtue. Christ had this mind when He lowered Himself as a bondservant in order to submit Himself unto death (Phil. 2:7-8). If my entrance into the church and into God’s kingdom is not based on my merit, but strictly and simply on the grace of God and His election, then I have everything to be humble about. We are called to be servants, for this fosters unity in the body of Christ.

Gentleness. ‘Gentleness’ or ‘meekness’ (*prautēs*) means being spiritually and morally strong without being self-assertive, pushy, or heavy-handed. It was used in classical Greek in the good sense of mildness or gentleness of character. Many people equate meekness with a certain ‘mouseyness’ or weakness. On the contrary, the word denotes silent, personal, controlled strength. Moses is aptly described in Numbers 12:3 as ‘very meek.’ A person who displays this meekness actively involves himself in service to others and never asserts his rights to someone else’s detriment.

When the apostle says that humility and gentleness are to be manifested as being worthy of the calling wherewith we were called, that excludes a spirit of arrogance or brutality which is demeaning towards other people.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

c) Longsuffering and Forbearance (4:2b)

It is impossible for any two people to live together without having some point of conflict. We all find places and things that irritate or annoy us, where we disagree among ourselves. The question is, how we learn to live with other people.

Longsuffering. *Makrothymia* is the Greek word for patience or longsuffering. It is sometimes used of steadfast endurance of suffering or misfortune (James 5:10), but more often, as is the case here, of slowness in avenging wrong or retaliating when hurt by another. It is being hurt again and again, but not complaining. It takes time to learn patience, and unfortunately one of the chief ways we learn it is through suffering (*cp.* Rom. 5:3). Paul desires that his readers be longsuffering toward others and toward the circumstances in which they find themselves. A gentle person has little regard for his own personal claims or status. This quality of putting others first will necessarily lead to uncomplaining endurance of intolerable situations and people. If we have problems with our own patience, we should begin working on becoming more gentle.

One dangerous thing within the body of Christ is that long-suffering may be confused with indifference. Churches which adopt a liberal theology tend to be very tolerant of just about any form of behavior or theology. But when you get into a conservative Christian community, where people hold the truths of Scripture to be precious, you will often find people ready to fight over every minor point of dispute in theology.

Forbearance. Forbearance flows naturally out of patience; it is the practical outworking of longsuffering. It relates specifically to the trials we have as a result of uncharitable conduct toward us by other Christians. It involves bearing with one another's weaknesses, not ceasing to love one's neighbors or friends because of those faults in them which perhaps offend or displease us. Without patience, people cannot forbear one another, for to do so is a choice of mutual tolerance. To be tolerant of another means to indulge another's views and allow peace to permeate the body of Christ. The spirit that is to be manifested in long-suffering is the spirit of love: love for God and love for people. Those who are 'bearing with one another in love' are refusing to strike back or be bitter.

d) Unity of the Spirit (4:3)

Each of the preceding characteristics is related to the others, and they have all been tending in the direction of this great matter or unity. A Christian diligently preserves the unity of the Spirit. If believers are not forbearing toward one another, they will not be diligent in preserving the peace. The Greek participle *spoudazontes* ('endeavoring') conveys the idea of zealous effort and care. Believers have the duty to preserve the unity of the body, but not at the expense of purity.

You have to work to maintain unity, but nobody has to create it. It exists already; it is a unity the Holy Spirit has already given to those who are in Christ. All divisive barriers have been removed by the work of Christ. The Spirit-forged bonds exist. But they have to be preserved.

The Holy Spirit is not a cause of contentiousness, for He binds people together in peace, not only in terms of cessation from military conflict, but in terms of personal relationships. Here the Spirit is called the 'bond' of that peace. He is literally the cement that binds people together.

If we want unity, we need to have patience, tolerance, forbearance, and humility. We are not to let others walk over us, but we need to be tolerant of each other, because there are things that each one of us do that irritate one another. We need to forbear those things to have unity. We are bonded to one another in Christ.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

2. Sevenfold Unity (4:4-6)

Paul uses the word ‘one’ as an adjective seven times. ‘Seven’ is the number of spiritual unity or perfection. There are seven eternal realities which we possess in common with all believers everywhere. Oneness is the goal of Christianity (*cp.* Jn. 17:21, 23). What we share is immeasurably greater than what differentiates us. It is not logical that we should live in any form of disunity.

Paul is using this litany of unity to show that there is no longer any Jew-Gentile distinction. They are all one – they all share the same faith. But this also applies to us. We have this phenomenon of denominations that separate us. But we need to recognize that we are united together.

a) One Body, One Spirit One Hope (4:4)

One Body. Each local church is a microcosm, or miniature representation, of the whole church. Paul’s concern here is to stress the church’s unity by using the body as a metaphor for the church. A body is something that works together, even though it is composed of many diverse parts. Its head is the Lord Jesus Christ, and each member is an organ, such as an ear, an eye, or a foot. Those organs are members of one another. Moreover, its unity is organic. The church is not a diesel engine or a watch or an airplane. It is a body. It grows by the multiplication of cells. This unity is indeed a spiritual unity, and therefore transcends and surpasses an association or society with its basis in the things of this world.

There may be many denominations, but there is a distinction in theology between the visible church and the invisible church. The visible church may be distressingly and sorely fractured and fragmented into all different kinds of denominations and groups, but the invisible church is the true body of Christ. A number of varying convictions lead to denominationalism, but the true believer, no matter his affiliation, is bonded with other believers because Christ is the glue. Everyone who is in Christ, and in whom Christ dwells, is a member of this one universal church.

One Spirit. Paul is not saying, ‘You are all one spirit in the sense that you are one in your enthusiasms and goals.’ Rather he is saying, ‘You are one because of the one work of the one Holy Spirit.’ When he talks like this Paul is calling our attention to what the Holy Spirit has done in our conversions. We have many differences in the small particulars of our conversions. But when we begin to talk about what the Holy Spirit did in our hearts to bring us to faith in Christ, our experiences are identical. There are not several spirits bringing people from unbelief to Christ. We are all animated by the one Spirit of God, and He it is who gives us the family-feeling we have towards fellow Christians. It is in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit that the unity of the body of Christ is guaranteed. This fact prevents any view of the church as a mere organization; for the presence of the Spirit constitutes the church, and is the basis of its unity.

One Hope. Paul has already talked about the hope God’s calling gives us in 1:18. The same God calls us to the same privileges and the same destination. We cannot argue as if we were on different roads bound for different places. We may argue over the specifics, but ultimately there is only ‘one hope:’ the triumph of Jesus, as the King of kings and Lord of lords. We all hope in the return of Christ, the Resurrection, and the Last Judgment. The Spirit is ‘the guarantee’ (1:14) and the pledge that in the end all will stand together in the presence of the Lord and be restored fully to His likeness and possess His inheritance.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

b) One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism (4:5)

The unities of verse 4—‘one body ... one Spirit ... one hope’—go together. It is the work of the one Holy Spirit to graft us into the one body and gives us that one hope. Verse 5 introduces another set of three: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism.’ These unities are clustered around the one Lord Jesus Christ, just as the first three are clustered around the Holy Spirit.

One Lord. There is only ‘one Lord’ of the church. We don’t have a church that is ruled by a heavenly committee. Jesus Christ is Lord. All who believers were chosen in Him. We were redeemed by Him. We follow Him. It is under His lordship, and His alone, that we live.

One Faith. True faith does not scatter people; it joins them together. Objectively it means the content of faith or what we believe, the gospel. There may be many manifestations of that faith, many debates about the content of that faith, but ultimately there is only one apostolic faith which has been delivered once and for all. Paul is saying that because we have one Lord we also have one faith. We believe that God Almighty sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to become like us and die for our salvation. And it is through faith in His work, not in anything that we have done or can do, but in His work of dying for us that we are saved.

One Baptism. Baptism comes from the Greek word *baptizō*, ‘to be identified with.’ Paul is not concerned here with modes of baptism, but with what baptism signifies, namely, identification with Christ. That is the unifying thing. There is only one initiatory rite into the visible church conferred upon us by God the Father, which identifies us with God the Son. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is what inaugurates you into the spiritual dimension and makes you a member of Christ’s body (1 Cor. 12:13). All have passed through the same initiation and have been ‘baptized into Christ’ (Gal. 3:27), not into a variety of leaders, such as Paul, Peter, and Apollos (1 Cor. 1:13). The sacrament is therefore a sacrament of unity. That is the spiritual reality. Baptism in water is not something different. It is the outward and visible sign of what has happened to you inwardly and invisibly; it is not the instrument of salvation.

- *What does Paul mean by one baptism (4:5)?*

c) One God and Father of All (4:6)

One God. The ultimate unity is found in the character of God Himself. The ‘all’ of whom God is Father refers to Christians, the household of faith (2:19) and not to all people in a universal sense. Therefore, all Christians belong together as brothers and sisters, and share the conviction that God is their Father. We gather round the same throne and whisper the sweet name of ‘Father’ to the one who sits there. He is our King and ‘above’ us all. He is absolutely supreme. God is over everything. He permeates all things. He is in all things.

Verse 6 contains the seventh item, the last of all. The first three have been centered around the Holy Spirit; the second three have been centered around the Lord Jesus Christ. This one concerns God the Father, the first person in the Godhead. Why is it that the apostle Paul puts the Holy Spirit first, the Lord Jesus Christ second, and God the Father third? We say Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here Paul says Spirit, Son, and Father.

Why is this? Perhaps it is because the apostle is arguing from the effect to the cause. He has said in verse 3, ‘Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.’ This refers to the visible unity the Holy Spirit has given the church. So he starts with the one body, which is visible, and with the Holy Spirit Himself. But then we ask, ‘Where did this effect come from? How did the church get to be the church?’ The answer is: through the work of

Ephesians – Lesson 8

Christ. The church is the company of those who follow Christ. Thus, Paul moves from a discussion of what the Holy Spirit does to what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. And if at that point we say, ‘Yes, but why did the Lord Jesus Christ do that?’, the answer is that all this flows from the one God who is over all and through all and in all.

The Trinity was an integral part of Paul’s emphasis on oneness and unity. God the Holy Spirit (4:4), God the Son (4:5), and God the Father (4:6) are not three separate entities, but one God existing in three persons with different functions to perform. Though formulations of the doctrine are post-apostolic, the Trinity, nonetheless, was thoroughly apostolic in origin. Here in Ephesians we see the importance of Paul’s three-in-one concept. The word ‘Trinity’ does not appear, but the concept and word formulations do.

B. Diversity in Unity (Eph. 4:7-16)

1. The Gift Giver (4:7-10)

Paul’s main point in this section is that Christ distributes spiritual gifts according to His own will, and that the giving of them flows from His ascension. ‘All’ are members of one body, but ‘some’ have received one gift and ‘some’ another. Texts such as the one in front of us and others (*cp.* 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Rom. 12:4-6) give us a model for church unity which is not that of a well-oiled organization or of identically manufactured objects, but of a body—a body containing diverse but essential and contributing parts. Without the things all Christians share—the common experience of their being joined to Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit—there is no church at all. But on the other hand, without a diversity of gifts the church is not healthy and cannot function completely, any more than a body can function completely without arms or legs.

a) To Each One of Us (4:7)

In verse 7, Paul changes tone as he moves away from unity to diversity. He changes his words from ‘all’ in 4:6 to ‘each’ in 4:7 to emphasize the individual. One of the beautiful things about the New Testament church is that it is a community. But the New Testament does not advocate uniformity, where everybody has to look alike, speak alike, and do alike. The fact that we are all *one* does not mean that we are all the *same*! No, the body of Christ is a beautiful mixture of unity and diversity. In that sense it is a microcosm of the universe itself.

Every person who is in Christ is a *charismatic*. When we use the term ‘charismatic’ today, we are describing somebody who has some special endowment or gift. The word ‘charismatic’ comes from the Greek word, *charis*, which means gift, or grace. The apostle states that all Christians have been gifted by the grace of God. This implies that there is no place for boasting. But they don’t get the same gifts. Paul elaborates this theme in 1 Corinthians 12, when he talks about the eye, the nose, the ear, and so on, with his analogy of the human body. No one has all the gifts, but it is also true that no member of the body is without some spiritual task and spiritual gift for it.

That kingdom oneness that unites us does not deny diversity. There is a hierarchy and division of labor within that unity. Grace is given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. The measure of Christ’s gift is infinite, isn’t it? So, what is given to us is infinite grace. Although each of us gets infinite grace, we each get different gifts. That is a reflection of our triune God – each person is infinitely God, and yet different; still God is one. The length and

Ephesians – Lesson 8

width and depth and height of Christ's gift is given to each one of us, and yet His gifts are different.

b) He Led Captivity Captive (4:8)

In the Old Testament the idea of ascending was linked to two activities. First, it described drawing near to the presence of God. The tabernacle was set on a hill and people went up to it. Later the Temple was built on a mountain in Jerusalem. The Psalms of Ascent (120-134) describe the worshippers' approach to the temple at the festival periods of Israel. So Jesus, when He ascended, entered God's presence.

Secondly, 'ascending' was connected to the enthronement after victory, when the spoils of battle would be brought up to God's house and captives from the battle would be led through the city. If Roman generals were immensely successful in war, a great parade was organized for them on their return to the capital. Trailing in the triumphal procession would be numbers of captives taken by that general in his engagements with the enemy. He would lead captivity captive. The general would then sit on an elevated chair and give out the plunder seized in war. This would go to those who had fought with him and for him. Very different gifts would go to very differing people.

Paul sees the bestowing of gifts as fulfilling Psalm 68:18, which Jews repeated in synagogue worship on the day of Pentecost. The psalm refers to a king who victoriously ascends on high with a procession of captives. However, Paul changes it, because the Psalm says that gifts were given to Him, while Paul says that He gives gifts to men. In the Old Testament, the soldiers bring the spoil and give gifts to the king from the booty. Instead, Jesus gives gifts to us. Paul sees Christ as the ascending king who led men from the captivity of hell and bestowed upon them gifts to serve Him in His new kingdom.

There are captives in Christ's great triumphal procession. This reference to captives is not a description of Satan but to Christ's people whom Christ defeated in the sense of destroying their sins and setting them free. *We* are those captives and we are taken, not in chains, but to sit in heavenly places with him. He presented the train, comprising His people, to the Father. It is to those same captives that the Conqueror dispenses His widely varying gifts. Oh, the grace of God!

Two points are worth stressing about Christ's dispensing these gifts. First, if they are given by Jesus, then they are to be used for the purposes for which He gave them, namely, the service and edification of the church. They are not to be used for selfish ends, above all not for drawing attention to the personality or programs of the one using them. Second, the gifts are given to each Christian—that is, everyone has at least one gift—and for that reason, the church is only fully vigorous and healthy when all are ministering.

c) Descending and Ascending (4:9-10)

- *What does it mean that Christ descended into the lower part of the earth (4:9)? See Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:24-28.*

When Paul says that Christ 'descended,' he is not referring to Christ's death and burial but to His incarnation, when He became a man and lived on earth, so low in comparison with His heavenly home (*cp.* Is. 44:23). This view is shared by R. C. Sproul and John Calvin.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

Other commentators believe that Christ descended into the lower regions of the earth, that is Hades or Sheol (*cp.* Ps. 16:19; Acts 2:24-28). Christ's descent is a reference to His humiliation and death. He went down into the realm of death. Christ has won an immense victory by His death and resurrection. There is nowhere that Christ does not reign—He who came to the very lowest place of all!

When we read that 'He ascended,' the meaning is clear. After His resurrection He was exalted in glory. Christ has been exalted to the highest honor and glory possible (Phil. 2:9-11); He has returned to the father from whom He came into the world.

He has descended and ascended 'that He might fill all things. He is supreme over all the powers of heaven and earth (*cp.* Col. 1:16-18); there is nothing that is not subject to Him, no place or order of existence where His presence may not be known and felt. Both the descent and the ascent have this purpose. We are also to realize that the ascended Lord whom the church now worships is the same as He who came down and lived among us, sharing our sorrows, trials, and temptations, and therefore He feels those of His people today.

2. The Gifts (4:11-13)

a) Teaching Gifts (4:11)

After Jesus ascended into heaven in triumph and sat at the right hand of God, perhaps the first act of the new King was Pentecost (Acts 2), when He poured out His Holy Spirit to gift every member of the church. There are many more gifts than those listed in verse 11. Christ's gifts to His church (also called the gifts of the Spirit) are listed in four separate chapters of the New Testament and in one of those chapters in two places. So there are five lists in all (1 Cor. 12:8-10; 28-30; Rom. 12:6-8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pe. 4:11). In all there may be nineteen or twenty gifts mentioned, but this is not an absolute figure.

In verse 11, Paul talks about one aspect only of Christian work – the founding of a local church. There are four groups of gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers. Pastors and teachers are linked by a different word 'and' than between the others.

Apostles. An apostle is an authoritative teacher and interpreter of the Christian faith, appointed to this task by the risen Christ whom he has seen personally (*cp.* 1 Cor. 9:1-2). These were those individuals chosen by Christ to be the foundation stones of the church and as such ceased to exist when the original apostles died.

Prophets. Prophets are people who receive new revelation directly from God and faithfully transmit it to the church. These were closely linked with the apostles and, among other activities, helped write the New Testament. Since the Bible is complete, there are not any prophets today.

Evangelists. Unlike the first two gifts, the gift of evangelism has not ceased, but it is sad that in the period of church history there have been only a few who are so gifted. An evangelist is one who possesses a special ability to communicate the gospel of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. 'Evangel' means 'gospel, so we could translate 'evangelist' as 'gospeller.' Evangelists are needed to keep on defining the true gospel in the face of subtle enemies who would destroy it. Timothy was such an evangelist and Paul sent him to ward off false teachers in Ephesus, as well as in other churches he had founded (*cp.* 2 Tim. 4:5). Philip was also called an evangelist (Acts 21:8). The term could also describe church planters who develop new churches or

Ephesians – Lesson 8

missionaries. This gift of evangelism is not limited to those who are ‘professionals’ but could be given to anyone who can communicate the gospel extremely effectively.

Pastor-Teachers. The fourth type of leader is the person who is both a pastor and a teacher (the terms are linked together as one individual). These are the elders of the local church. Pastor-teachers were gifted to be responsible for the day-to-day building up of the church. The word ‘pastor’ means ‘shepherd’ and refers to one who has pastoral oversight of others. Christ sends certain men to be His under-shepherds. Their responsibility is to tend His sheep (*cp.* Heb. 13:20; 1 Pe. 5:4). Their supreme task is to lead them into good pasture and to nourish them, all the time protecting them from what might harm them. How are spiritual sheep fed? By the Word of God, of course. Every pastor must be ‘an apt teacher’ (1 Tim. 3:2; *cp.* Titus 1:9). This explains why ‘pastor and teachers’ are one and the same people – they are to come alongside of another and disciple them.

Although there are significant differences between the gifts Paul lists in verse 11, it is worth noting that (in this list at least) all the gifts of the Lord to the church involve teaching. This is not to say that there are not other gifts that do not particularly involve teaching. But it does mean that the teaching gifts are particularly needed if the church is to mature in the direction Paul describes.

b) Equipping and Edifying (4:12)

If these gifts really are diverse, how in the light of this diversity is the unity of the church to be maintained? What is to keep everyone from going off in a different direction to do his or her own thing? The answer to that question is in the purpose for which the gifts have been given. What is the purpose of Christ’s gifts? It is to serve Christ’s people, so that the body itself might become increasingly unified in faith and mature and practice.

Why do we have these high offices? Their whole purpose is to equip the saints, so these high officers need to be humble, because they are serving others. The result of the work of service is that the body of Christ is built up. The work of service is all the dominion work that you do – including your secular occupations. The result is the building up of the body of Christ. It is also visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, explaining the gospel, etc. The job of the pastors and teachers is to bring the flock into the kingdom, so that they are equipped to go out into the world and bring others into the kingdom.

The reason why certain gifts are given for leadership is to equip the believers for ministry. The word ‘equipping’ (*katartismos*) means ‘perfecting’ what is lacking in the faith of Christians. The church is to be a mobilized army. In addition to ministering to the needs of people, leaders are called to train people, to give them the equipment, the tools, the knowledge, and the skills necessary for works of service. Each and every Christian has a ‘work of ministry (*diakonia*).’ This word is used of menial service, and so of the particular work of those who came to be known as ‘deacons,’ but it is also used in the more general sense of our word ‘service’ (see 3:7). The gifts are given to leaders, not to tear apart the body of Christ, but for the edification, the uplifting, the strengthening, and the building up (*oikodomē*) of people. The church is increased and built up, and its members edified, as each member uses his or her particular gifts as the Lord of the church ordains, and thus gives spiritual service to fellow-members and to the head.

In the original King James Version there was an extra comma inserted in verse twelve: ‘for the perfecting of the saints, [the extra comma] for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’ In this version of the text God is said to have given the teaching gifts, which we

Ephesians – Lesson 8

normally associate with ministers, so that the ministers may do three things: 1) perfect the saints, 2) do the ministry, and 3) edify or build up the body of Christ. That is, the professionals do it all. They have the gifts and they are to use them to do all the church's work. But that translation is wrong!

Without the comma, the passage says something entirely different. Instead of three tasks to 'ministers,' it gives one task to the clergy ('equip the saints') and another to the laity ('do the ministry'). As a result of both fulfilling their proper, God-given function, 'the body of Christ may be built up.' Here is the real sequence: 1) Those who have been given the gifts of teaching are to use those gifts to equip or 'prepare' the saints, so that, as a first objective, 2) believers may do the work of 'ministry' or 'service,' and that, as an ultimate objective, 3) the church may be 'built up,' 'reach unity in the faith,' and 'become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.'

The proper relationship of clergy to laypersons is *service*, and the proper function of the laity is *service* as well. The clergy serve the laity by teaching and thus preparing them for ministry. The laity serve others by building up the church and by ministering evangelistically to the world.

c) Unity, Knowledge, and Maturity (4:13)

The verb used at the beginning of this verse (*katantaō*) is used nine times in Acts for travelers arriving at their destinations. So, the church is on a journey, and the end of the journey is described in three ways: unity of faith, unity of knowledge, and maturity.

Why do we have these different things? So we can be built up into the unity of the faith. Once again we have unity. The principle of unity is inviolable, having been established by God. The practice of unity, however, is violable, being broken all the time. The goal of maturity in Christ is to successfully unite those two.

Up to this point Paul has been speaking of unity as a given, as something the church has and must maintain. But in verse 13, Paul speaks of reaching 'unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.' This unity is something to be attained. It does not yet exist but is an expression of the full maturity to which the church and its members should aspire.

'The faith' refers to the theological content of Christianity (*cp.* Jude 3). "Knowledge of the Son of God" refers to experiential knowledge of Jesus attained through day-by-day discipleship. Paul means knowledge that goes beyond what can be packed into the head, knowledge that also trickles down into the heart and flows out into the life in obedient and loving service to the Lord. This twofold knowledge—of the head and of the heart—is what Paul says the mature church should attain. But far more important than any outward show of unity is that deep, inward, motivational unity that comes from believers growing in a knowledge of the truth, as we find it in the Bible, and living that truth out experientially in day-by-day fellowship with Jesus Christ. This reality transcends denominational and all other barriers.

We are supposed to grow up to a mature man. Paul speaks of maturity in various ways: 'to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.' The Greek word *teleios* used here ('mature') has the connotation of full development. 'Manhood' here means adulthood, as contrasted with *nēpios*, the word in the next verse here for 'children.' The 'fullness of Christ' is the complete possession of the gifts and grace of Christ that He seeks to impart to humanity. Whether the goal can be realized in this life or not is irrelevant. The point is that the Christian is to press forward with no lesser ambition than this.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

Maturity does not come overnight. It is progressive. That can be frustrating, because we want maturity, but we need to be patient. How do we grow? Through reading the Scriptures, through listening to the pastors and teachers.

The image on which the church is modeling itself, and into which it is being shaped, is that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are not only to have an experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ and His ways. We are to become increasingly like Him. The church never loses sight of this ideal, works constantly towards it, and feels it cannot be satisfied with anything less than perfection, which is the ‘measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.’ However, that is impossible, because that is infinite. This means we will never stop growing. Heaven will not be boring – we will be growing throughout eternity.

When Paul talks about maturity, he is thinking not so much of individual believers as of the church as a whole. He is saying that just as there is a growth in maturity for the individual, so also there is a growth in maturity for the church corporately. Do you pray for that? It is what the Lord Jesus Christ wants to see in the people who constitute His body.

3. Growth in Maturity (4:14-16)

- *How can we stop from being children tossed about by winds of doctrine (4:14-16)?*

To grow up into Christ, no longer to be children or adolescents in our faith, but to grow up into all aspects of Christ, that is the goal. Paul’s chief purpose for the church is that it might become full-grown and that each of its members might contribute to that maturity by becoming spiritual adults.

a) No Longer Children (4:14)

The Bible calls us to be like children in two specific ways. First, Jesus says that unless we approach the kingdom of God as little children, we will never enter it (Mt. 18:3). That is, we are to approach the kingdom of God with a simple, childlike trust in God. The second way in which the Scripture directs us to be children is, ‘In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults’ (1 Cor. 14:20).

However, here we are called to be children no longer. With immaturity goes gullibility. Infants are easily taken in or tricked. If they were more mature they would not be so easily deceived. Paul has in mind false teachers.

If we mature, then we will no longer be like children. Christ was able to walk on the Sea of Galilee, through the winds and waves. He was not carried about by winds but was able to cut through them. And that is what we are supposed to be – not tossed about by waves and winds. ‘Tossed to and fro’ is the verb from the noun *klydōn*, used in Luke 8:24 of the raging of the waters of Galilee, and in James 1:6 for the ‘surge of the sea.’ The picture is probably that of a boat ‘tossed’ in the storm and ‘carried about’ (*peripherō*). This second Greek verb often has the idea of such violent swing about as makes a person dizzy. The unsteady and rudderless could easily be turned from their course.

Not only can some be deceived and go astray without realizing it, but there are also some who lie in wait to deceive. Their activities are described firstly by the word *kybia*, which means literally plying with dice, and hence trickery or fraud; and secondly as ‘craftiness’ (*panourgia*), the word used with reference to our Lord’s questioners (Lk. 20:23), and in 2 Corinthians 11:3 of the guile

Ephesians – Lesson 8

of the serpent. Thus through the trickiness and craftiness of men, Satan attempts to draw us away from the truth.

In verse 11 above, Paul lists specific teaching gifts since these are the ways the church is to grow out of spiritual infancy to maturity. One of the tragedies of our day is that the church is so immature in this area. Consequently, it is always being carried along by the world's fads or being led astray by false theology.

b) Speaking the Truth in Love (4:15a)

It is the task of Christians to be people of the truth. They are called to search the truth, to understand the truth, to communicate the truth. But it is not simply abstract propositional utterance that they are to make. They are to hold this truth that is precious to them 'in love.' The combination of truth and love means both speaking and living the truth in a loving manner. In the combination of these goals, love is emphasized. Of course, this phrase, 'speaking the truth (*aletheuō*) in love,' is used for all kinds of devious personal attacks that one believer will make on another. Such deceive others to make their own gain; Christians are to hold forth the truth in order to bring spiritual benefit to others, and they are to do so with a winsomeness that only love can make possible.

c) Growth of the Body (4:15b-16)

Paul is mixing the language of architecture and anatomy. The tabernacle was erected and held in place by each other part – each wall was attached to another wall and that is what created the support. So when every joint was put in place, the building was erected. Similarly, in the human body, if the bones are connected to one another, you can stand; otherwise you cannot. Paul says that growing up in Christ is like that. It is like a building being built up together of different pieces. The diversity of the pieces does not destroy the unity of the building or body. Some of us are ears, hands, eyes, etc. Some of us are doors, windows, bricks, walls, etc.

From Christ alone, as head, the body derives its whole capacity for growth and activity and its direction as one co-ordinated, directed entity (*cp.* Col. 2:19). 'Joined together' derives from a word (*harmos*) used for a joint or fastening in the construction of a building, or for the shoulder-joint of the body. The second participle (*synbibazomenon*) is used in a general way of bringing things or people together, and of reconciling those who have quarreled, and of putting together facts in an argument or a course of teaching. Both participles thus give the sense of a functional unity, that is made possible among the members by the direction of the head. The word translated 'joint' (*haphē*) has many meanings. Basically it means a 'touch,' and so can mean 'contact,' 'point of contact,' or 'grip,' and these meanings have led commentators to a variety of interpretations, although 'joint' is most likely the proper translation.

Then we are brought back to a word (*energeia*) that has become familiar in this letter (1:19; 3:7), as the apostle turns from the consideration of the members and the connection between them, to the whole 'working properly.' 'Each part,' in its place and according to its need, must have this functioning that is made possible by the 'energizing' of God in the whole.

All the parts are vital and essential for the healthy and complete functioning of the body. When each part does its bit, the whole body grows and is strengthened, and Christ's spirit of love pervades it all. So every member is called by the Holy Spirit to participate in the ministry of Christ. Every person in the body of Christ has a significant task to perform. No one is insignificant; no one is unimportant.

Ephesians – Lesson 8

The believer may be likened to part of a puzzle. If a piece is missing, the puzzle is not complete. Each piece, however, fits perfectly together and has a specific place in relation to the whole. As part of the body of Christ, the individual believer has a specific ‘working’ function—to respond to the head (Christ), causing ‘growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.’

Growth takes time. The church does not become mature overnight any more than we as individuals become mature overnight. But if God is nevertheless working to accomplish this in us, we must trust Him to do it and be patient as He works. PBPWIMGIFWY – ‘Please be patient with me, God isn’t finished with me yet!’

Paul’s overall message is crystal clear. The church is a body where each member lives for the well-being of the whole. Nobody thinks of himself but does what he can, however modest, to enrich the others. Love is the energy which activates every nerve. Where this happens the body grows. It becomes more like its Head and operates in fuller submission to Him. Unity and maturity are vitally linked to each other and can never be separated.

Today, spiritual maturity is often presented as an individual affair. This is a grave misunderstanding. Physical organs do not mature in isolation from each other. The only maturing that ever takes place is in the context of a growing body.

There is a lot of talk today about living the Christian life at home, or in the world. These subjects are vital and Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians will cover them shortly. Why does Paul not tackle them straight away? It is because he knows we will never make much progress in those areas until we have first learned to live the Christian life *in the church*. Those who fail there fail everywhere. They also hold back the spiritual development of others.

C. Application Questions

- *I realize that I have trouble with either humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, or diligence. How can I overcome this fault this week to the glory of God?*
- *I am identified with Christ. How do I display my identification to my neighbors? If I suddenly realize I am not displaying the badge of Christ, what can I do for my neighbor to give God the glory?*

For next time: Read Ephesians 4:17-32 and Stuart chapter 9.