

p 57 WEEK 8: CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Ephesians 4:1–16

The Place of the Passage

Paul will now exhort the Ephesians to consider the practical outworking of God’s plan for the church. In Ephesians 1–3 he has exhibited the church as Christ’s body—one new man created for good works that “God prepared beforehand, that we should *walk* in them” (2:10). In Ephesians 4–6 he develops the theme of “walking” as the new way of living for those in Christ (4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15).

The Big Picture

Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian believers to walk according to their calling recognizes the role of Christ’s diverse gifts in the church’s building itself up in love. Paul will move from an emphasis on the oneness of the members of the body to a focus on their works as individual members participating in the maturity of the local assembly.

p 58 Reflection and Discussion

Read the entire text for this week’s study, Ephesians 4:1–16. Then review the following questions concerning this section of Ephesians and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2267–2269; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. Trinitarian Unity (Eph. 4:1–6)

Paul urges the saints to walk “worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility” (Eph. 4:1–2). How would you summarize this calling? Why are the virtues of humility, gentleness, and patience necessary to endure differences “in love” (v. 2) and to “maintain the unity” (v. 3) provided by the gospel?

Why does Christian unity necessitate agreement on “one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all”? What might this say about the important interplay of doctrine and unity? (Do Paul’s words in vv. 4–6 remind you of a formal confession of faith, such as the Apostles’ Creed?)

On the basis of Ephesians 4:1–6, what would walking *unworthy* of their calling have looked like among the Ephesian believers?

p 59 2. Gifted Diversity (Eph. 4:7–12)

“Grace was given to each one of us” (v. 7) indicates that every member of the body has a supernatural enabling that is important to a local congregation’s fulfillment of its calling. Paul’s quotation of Psalm 68:18 connects the giving of gifts to Christ’s ascension. What is the significance of the ascension in empowering the church to fulfill the mandates of the gospel?

Jesus conquered demonic “captives” before ascending “far above all the heavens.” Why did the descent of Christ “into the lower regions” need to precede his filling of all things?

Christ gave gifts to every believer through the outpouring of the Spirit. He also gave gifts to the corporate body of believers in this same outpouring, to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” In light of what Paul previously wrote (1:1; 2:20), how did the apostles’ and prophets’ ministries equip believers?

p 60 How do the ministries of evangelists, pastors, and teachers equip believers to do the work of building up the body? What attitudes should the Ephesians have toward the distinction between the roles of officers and members of the body?

3. Church Maturity (4:13–16)

Christ intends for his people to use their individual gifts to create an integrated body; he gives leaders so that each believer increases in the “knowledge of the Son of God.” How does the proper functioning of gifts work to create unity among believers? What contributions do members of a church make toward helping one another mature in their understanding of Christ and his will for believers?

Once unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God is attained, the “one new man” (2:15) will reach full manhood—“the fullness of Christ.” What does Paul say in 4:13–16 about the contribution of body life to the maturing of individual believers?

p 61 An assembly that grows is no longer “children,” subject to deceptive teachings. How does a properly operating relationship between gifts, officers, unity, and knowledge of the Son help individual believers to live successfully in the church and the world?

How does “speaking the truth in love” (4:15) toward brothers and sisters facilitate growing up into the head of the body? If “every joint” and “each part” are working to bring about spiritual maturity in the church, how does Paul conclude that Christ, as the head, is accomplishing the growth of believers?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

THE DESCENT OF CHRIST. “He descended into hell” is one line of the Apostles’ Creed. While this line raises significant textual and theological questions, it seems to be reflective of two aspects of the redemptive work of Christ. First, Christ takes the penalty of hell upon himself as the wrath of God is poured out on him rather than on believers—as he becomes the propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25). Second, Christ does descend “into the lower regions” (Eph. 4:9) in order to defeat death and to triumph over the demonic (Col. 2:15). (See the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2268.)

p 62 GIFTS TO THE CHURCH. In the ascension, Christ returned from the earth to his throne as vice-regent in heaven (Eph. 4:8). From there he sent the Holy Spirit into the world to empower believers for the task of gospel proclamation (Acts 1:4, 8; 2:33–35). With the coming of the Spirit also came gifts to the church so that believers might have supernatural resources for serving Christ in the world. Paul’s writings reveal special gifts given to leaders of the church to equip believers to build themselves up in Christ (4:11–12). We also read of individual gifts given to every believer (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:4–11). The resurrection and exaltation of Christ continue to benefit the church with practical empowerment to edify itself in love.

Whole-Bible Connections

PASTORS. The ongoing care of church membership falls to elders—qualified men who humbly shepherd believers according to the Word of God (Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17–22; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:2–5). Traditionally in the church, among the elders is the office of pastor, a vocational servant who gives primacy to preaching and teaching for equipping believers for service to one another (Eph. 4:11–12; 1 Tim. 3:1). The office of pastor follows the train of the shepherds of Israel, who were to lead the people according to the law of God. Unfortunately, many of Israel’s shepherds failed their callings, instead taking advantage of the flock (Ezekiel 34). God promised to replace their shepherds so that he himself might shepherd his people in righteousness (Ezek. 34:15). Christ has come as that Good Shepherd—the Great Shepherd who cares for all of the Lord’s sheep (Gen. 49:24; John 10:1–18; 1 Pet. 2:25). To him, shepherds of local congregations look for the model and for final accountability as their Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). Each believer and every congregation increases their own blessings when they submit themselves in obedience to Christlike pastors and elders (Heb. 13:17).

Theological Soundings

CHRIST-FILLED UNIVERSE. The consummation of history will include the awesome, sinless, perfect uniting of believers with God and with one another, such that we will be in him and he in us (Eph. 1:22–23; 1 Pet. 2:5), he will be one with the Father and the Spirit (John 10:28–30; 17:11, 22), and we will be members of one another (Eph. 2:19; 5:30). Then he who fills all in all will give all glory and honor to God the Father so that the Father might be all and in all (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Eph. 1:10, 23; 4:10). The glory and joy of this experience for believers will be beyond anything we can describe or imagine (1 Cor. 2:9).

p 63 BIBLICAL COMMUNITY. The church of Christ begins in the eternal election of believers in mercy as God’s workmanship; it does not have its origin in a social theory of people who decide they want to start a new assembly (Eph. 1:3–6; 2:4, 10). This chosen community may express itself in local congregations, but it is Christ’s church only to the extent that it is reflective of the calling, building, structuring, and governing of the church as Christ purposes and prescribes. This includes members, empowered by the Spirit of God and working in humility and unity under their leaders, lovingly building up one another toward maturity in Christ (Rom. 12:10; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess. 3:2; Heb. 10:24).

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 4:1–16 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

p 64 4. Ephesians 4:1–16

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ephesians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future. Review your Key Verse.