

than fulfilling the role of a servant whose primary purpose is to meet the needs of others within the body.

When we realize that Yeshua's purpose in "giving these gifts" to the *ekklesia* is so that those who make up the local community will grow in their walk with Him to become fully mature in their faith, we see how vitally important such service is. And what this verse teaches us is often missed, and that is this: it is not only the roles mentioned in the previous verse that do the serving. Rather, they are to "equip" all the believers within the body of Messiah to engage in the "work of service," i.e., in the work of serving others.

Remember that the list of roles began with "apostles and prophets," which should most likely picture the Twelve apostles plus Paul, by whom the inspired Apostolic Scriptures were given to the *ekklesia*, along with those prophets in the early communities of The Way who were much needed until such times as the written Scriptures were completed and available.

This brings us back to the final, combined designation "pastors and teachers." In combining these two designations, we recognize that a significant part of the shepherding which is to be done by "elders" or "overseers," is that of feeding the *ekklesia* from the word of God. Surely one of the primary aspects of shepherding sheep in the farming world is to make sure they are led to pastures which offer sufficient and good food. Before the word of God can be applied to the individual believer, equipping him or her to serve others as God intends, the Scriptures must be taught, understood, and then applied.

The word translated "equipping" (NASB) is (*kartartismos*) which is used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures, carries the sense of "giving a person the proper equipment to accomplish the stated task." Obviously "training" comes into the picture as well, since having equipment that one does not know how to use properly is not valuable. Thus having both the right way of thinking, as based upon the Scriptures, and then also the proper application of that truth to life situations, is the goal of the equipping that must take place.

Finally, the text is clear that "the work of service" means that everyone in the body of Messiah is to see himself or herself as serving others for the primary purpose of establishing unity and success in making known the glories of Yeshua and the good news of the redemption He has procured for all who come to Him in saving faith.

...to the building up of the body of Messiah; – The manner in which Paul constructs the Greek of verses 11–12 helps us to understand the overall purpose for the gifts Yeshua has given to the *ekklesia* as the ascended,

victorious Messiah and King. He has given people as gifts to the *ekkle-sia*, and in this final phrase of v. 12, we see the ultimate goal which is achieved when those who comprise the local communities of the *ekkle-sia* function as He intends.

The Greek of v. 11 uses the particle *μέν* (*men*), “on the one hand” or “so then...,” to begin the sequence and this is followed by the preposition *πρός* (*pros*), “to,” offering the purpose for giving “apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers,” and this is followed by the repeated preposition *εἰς*, *eis*, “unto, for” indicating the goal or purpose. The meaning of this Greek construction could be illustrated this way:

“He began by giving apostles and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors who are teachers, for the purpose of equipping the saints so that they would be able to accomplish the work of serving each other so that the body of Messiah would be built together as God intends.”

Thus we see that the ultimate purpose or goal of Messiah giving leaders who equip the saints for the work of serving one another is so that everyone who is in the body of Messiah would be spiritually strengthened. Such spiritual strength enables the body of Messiah to honor Him before a watching world as those who comprise the community demonstrate the riches of His grace and love by how they care for each other with lives characterized by integrity. For, as the following context of our chapter makes clear, such spiritual strength and growth is the process of becoming more and more like our Messiah. Therefore, the “building up of the body of Messiah” should be understood as qualitative, not quantitative. It is not the numerical growth of the local community of the *ekkle-sia* which Paul has in mind here, but the spiritual growth of all those who confess Yeshua to be their Lord.

In summary of verses 11–12, we see that “apostles and prophets” may be viewed as the “foundation” of the *ekkle-sia* Yeshua promises to build or enlarge, while the “evangelists” and “pastor-teachers” are gifted to teach and make applicable the Scriptures God has given us via the apostles and prophets. This teaching function must have as its goal the “equipping” of the saints in order that they may be enabled to accomplish the “work of service” which God has given them, and thus together to cause the maturing of the body of Messiah to the end that He would be glorified. And it is to this ultimate goal that Paul describes in the next verse.

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah.

The opening word of this verse is, in the Greek (*μέχρι, mexri*), used here to identify the ultimate goal to which the *ekklesia* of Yeshua must strive. Moreover, that Paul defines our ultimate goal for which we are to strive as attaining to the “fullness of Messiah” means that this will be a life-long endeavor. Those who teach that the believer is to attain final sanctification in this life (also called “sinless perfectionism,”) so that the believer no longer sins, have twisted the Scriptures and are teaching a falsehood. As Calvin notes:

But Paul maintains that we must persevere in this course till all our deficiencies are supplied; that we must make progress till death, under the teaching of Christ alone....¹

One question that arises is whether the opening phrase of our verse, “until we all attain” is grammatically to be attached to the opening verb of v. 11, “And He gave...,” or to the verbal noun *οικοδομήν, oikodomēn*, “building up” in v. 12. If the former is correct, then Paul is teaching us that “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” were given to the *ekklesia* with the goal of their service to be that “all would attain to the unity of the faith.”² If the latter interpretation is received, the meaning would be that “the building up of the body” resulting from the proper serving of the whole is that which results in all attaining “to the unity of the faith.”³

But there really is no need to think that Paul has one or the other of these options in mind, for the language of the text itself is a unity. The “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” are given to the body of Messiah in order to equip the believers to serve, and in being so equipped, they serve as God intends and this combined enterprise results in the building up of the body of Messiah with the goal of full unity in the faith so that each member of the *ekklesia* grows with the goal of becoming more and more like Yeshua.

We see the complete picture here. The role of the evangelist and pastor-teacher is to teach the truths of the Scriptures given by the apostles

1 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 283.

2 See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 552.

3 See Thielmann, *Ephesians*, p. 281.

and prophets, and it is upon the foundation and personal application of God's word that the believers are equipped to fulfill their service within the body of Messiah, a service which enables all to become more and more like Yeshua. The picture Paul has given us is that of a community working together for the good of each individual and thus for the good of the whole. The success of the *ekklesia* ultimately depends upon the work of God Himself, but His method to assure that each believer in the body grows to full maturity is through each one serving others as they have been spiritually equipped to do.

...until we all attain – The Greek word here translated as “attain” is *καταντάω* (*katantaō*). Its basic sense is “to arrive at a given destination,” and metaphorically, “to reach a condition or goal.”¹ The inclusive language, “we all,” emphasizes the unity which Paul has already emphasized in v. 3, “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Such unity is exemplified in the fact that (vs. 4–6) there is “one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” Since there is a singularity in the focus of all who are believers, it is clear that none are left out of God's purpose to bring all to full maturity in Yeshua. Indeed, since all who are believers are “in Messiah,” the unity of believers within the body of Messiah flows from each one's union with Messiah in His death, resurrection, and life.

The picture is of all believers employing the gifts Christ has given to them in order to reach a goal that will likewise involve them all.²

While the process of spiritual maturity may involve different life experiences for each individual believer, it is clear that our Messiah expects all to reach a full level of maturity. The obvious characteristic of life in general is that it is marked by growth. It is incongruous, then, for a person to claim to be a child of God through faith in Yeshua but who shows no desire to mature in his or her faith. The term “carnal Christian” is clearly an oxymoron.

to the unity of the faith – Paul uses this same word “unity” (*ἐνότης*, *henotēs*) in 4:3 where he admonishes us to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.” The Ruach HaKodesh is the One Who works within every believer, not only to bring that person to faith, but

1 BDAG, “καταντάω,” p. 523.

2 Thielmann, *Ephesians*, p. 281.

also to indwell the believer in order to enable him or her in the ongoing process of sanctification through application of the scriptures.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2Thess 2:13)

In our text, unity is attached to “the faith,” meaning the body of truth by which saving faith is revealed, defined, and taught in the Scriptures. As in v. 4, the term “the faith” (τῆς πίστεως, *tēs pisteōs*) is used here to mean the objective truth to which all believers give full assent, that is, the truth as revealed in the Scriptures that forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation has been secured through the redemptive work of Yeshua and such salvation is attainable only by faith in Him. So in our verse, “the faith” refers to the content of what we believe. Once again, we see the Apostle emphasizing that the very bedrock upon which our redemption rests is the truth revealed to us in the eternal and unchanging word of God.

...and of the knowledge of the Son of God – Here the term “the faith,” i.e., the objective truth that defines our saving relationship with God, is specifically identified as the “knowledge of the Son of God.” We should first note that the word translated “knowledge” is the compound Greek word ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*) which seems to indicate “knowledge directed toward a particular object.”¹ Paul teaches us here that the object of this knowledge is “the Son of God” (τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ)² and that the goal of the believer is to grow in his or her knowledge of Yeshua.

Once again Paul is emphasizing that the unity of the faith is obtainable only when believers within their community strive to know the truth about Yeshua and His saving work, and affirm such truth together. True unity is not found in discarding boundaries and absolutes so that everyone can “just get along.” True unity within the body of Messiah flows from a willingness to submit to the truth as it has been given to us by God in His word, and to grow in understanding how living in accordance with the truth is to become more and more like the One from Whom the truth is revealed, even the Son of God.

The confession of *Sola Scriptura*, that the Scriptures are our final au-

1 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 553.

2 The context demands that τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ be understood as an objective genitive.

thority in obtaining “the knowledge of the Son of God,” is therefore foundational to all who seek to know Yeshua in truth and to become more and more conformed to His life of righteousness.

...to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. – The goal in growing in “the knowledge of the Son of God” is not an intellectual exercise to prove one’s intelligence but is rather to know Him in order to become like Him. This is what Paul defines as spiritual maturity, and it requires humility, for to become more and more like Yeshua means to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to live in accordance with the leading and urgings of the Spirit, as Paul teaches in Romans.

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom 8:13)

The interesting thing in this verse is that Paul uses the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (*anēr*) in the phrase “to a mature man.” The Greek word *anēr* is gender specific, meaning a “male” person. If Paul had intended to apply the phrase “to a mature man” to individuals within the body of Messiah, he would have used the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthrōpos*) which carries the sense of “human kind.”

In the context of our verse, Paul is using the metaphor of a “mature person” as a picture of the *ekklesia* in which individual believers begin their journey of faith as infants (the contrasting term he uses in the next verse) but who must grow to become mature in the Lord. But what is the standard by which such maturity of the body is measured? It is, once again, the very person of Yeshua Himself.

Further, that Paul is using the height of an adult as contrasted with that of infants is clear when he speaks of the “stature” of Messiah, for this Greek word *ἡλικία* (*hēlikia*) carries the sense of “height” so that Paul is using “height” to picture “maturity,” that is, as compared to infants.

The Greek word translated “mature” in our verse is *τέλειος* (*teleios*) and it may be that Paul has in mind the Torah commandment in Deut 18:13, “You shall be blameless before ADONAI your God,” where the LXX translates the Hebrew word *תָּמִים*, *tāmim*, “blameless” with the same word, *τέλειος* (*teleios*). Interestingly, this same word *teleios* is used when Yeshua teaches the disciples, “Be perfect (*τέλειοι*, *teleioi*), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (*τέλειός*, *teleios*) (Matt 5:48).

...which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. – The goal for every believer is to be like Messiah, and thus to grow in spiritual maturity to be able

to reflect the very mind and heart of the Messiah. When applied to the *ekklesia*, Paul wants us to view the community of faith as growing to express the very person of Messiah, that is, as eventually attaining Messiah's full height.

14–15 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Messiah,

Having clearly given the path that those who form the *ekklesia* must take, i.e., maturing in the faith and growing in spiritual strength in order to show for the very glories of Yeshua, he shows how important such growth is in order for the *ekklesia* not to remain immature and thus ineffective for the very mission to which we have been called. The Greek makes this clear by the initial ἵνα (*hina*) which the NASB translates "As a result."

Having drawn the picture of what the *ekklesia* should be, Paul contrasts the positive picture of what the *ekklesia* is to be with the negative metaphor of immaturity. The use of "children" (*νήπιος, νέπιος*) is in stark contrast to the "mature man" in the previous verse and offers the characteristics of naivety and ignorance. Since the "unity of the faith" and obtaining "the knowledge of the Son of God" requires being able to discern between what is true and what is false, if the *ekklesia* is to mature as God intends, those given to the *ekklesia* whose duty is to teach the truth must do their work carefully and well, and the community must be ready to receive their teaching and grow in the knowledge and practice of the truth. Once again, this is the truth as revealed to us in the Scriptures and not the creative inventions of unfruitful minds.