

complete “body of Messiah,” it is clear that in our context he views the local communities of believers as being the expression of the whole body in their respective locations. For it is the inner working—the life-to-life relationships—that he pictures when he speaks of the “whole body” in our verse.

The opening words “from whom” make it clear that Messiah Yeshua, Who is the “head of the body,” is the source for all that is needed for the “bodily growth” of the *ekklesia* which takes place as members of the local believing community care for each other and encourage one another in the life of faith. Here we see Paul affirming the reality of Yeshua’s promise when He proclaimed, “I will build My *ekklesia* and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt 16:18). Having ascended on high and thereby “giving gifts to men” (4:8), Yeshua has not only gifted individuals to be “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors who are teachers” to equip the saints for the work of service (4:11–12). He has also gifted each and every believer to serve within the gathered assembly for the mutual edification of the whole.

Paul emphasizes that the local *ekklesia* is “being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies.” Using the metaphor of the human body, Paul clearly teaches us here that each and every believer within the community of faith has an important and necessary, God-given function, to fulfill. Whether it is in the realm of encouraging new or young believers in the faith, caring for the physical needs of one another as an expression of God’s love and concern, praying for each other, encouraging and enabling corporate worship, etc., each one who confesses Yeshua to be his or her Lord and Savior, must see themselves as having been providentially placed within a community of faith both to be encouraged and strengthened in the faith as well as to encourage and help strengthen others in the faith.

Here Paul uses terms that relate to erecting a building. He states that believers in the body of Messiah are “fitted and held together.” The Greek word translated “fitted together” (*συναρμολογέω*, *sunarmologeō*) is used only twice in the Apostolic scriptures, here and in 2:21 where it describes the union of Jew and Gentile believers within the body of Messiah. The word itself pictures a building held together by tightly fitted joints. Since Yeshua is the One Who is building the *ekklesia*, we may be confident that, as His people follow the leading of the Spirit, they will find their place within the *ekklesia* as determined by the “master Builder.”

The second verb used is *συμβιβάζω* (*sumbibazō*), translated “held together” in our verse as well as in Col 1:19. It is interesting to note that in

early Greek literature, this verb

more frequently appears in political contexts where warring parties 'reconcile' their differences and Paul may have intended for it to carry those overtones here also.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, if unity is to characterize the body of Messiah as expressed in a local community of believers, then it is necessary that where division occurs, effort is made to achieve reconciliation between those who are at odds with each other. The whole matter of being "held together" requires that each member of the community commits themselves to finding ways to reconcile those differences which cause division. And of equal importance is to be careful that divisions are not the result of personal preferences. Once again, the Scriptures must be the final voice of authority for what is marked as clearly the will of God and what is left open to variation.

It should be noted that the Greek words translated as "fitted together" and "held together" are present participles indicating the normal, on-going function of each member of the body of Messiah. This requires that each person in the local assembly must commit himself or herself to encouraging and accomplishing this aspect of being "fitted and held together." This, in turn, requires a continuing spiritual growth for every member, becoming more and more like Messiah and thus more and more living out the true characteristics of one who is walking in His footsteps.

... by *what every joint supplies* – The Greek could be understood to indicate "through every assisting connection." Of issue is the Greek word translated "joint," which is ἀφή (*haphē*), found only here and in the parallel context of Col 2:18–19.

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments (τῶν ἀφῶν καὶ συνδέσμων), grows with a growth which is from God. (Col 2:18–19)

Note that in the Colossians text, our word "joint" is coupled with the

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 287. Cf. Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.74; Thucydides, *Pel. War* 2.29.6; Plato, *Protagoras* 337e.

word for “ligament” (σύνδεσμος, *sundesmos*), and it may be that in our Ephesians text, Paul has the same picture in mind. The joint allows for mobility while the ligament maintains the ability of the joint to function. Thus, there is the need for each member to be active in helping the community to grow in serving Yeshua, and this requires that each one works to maintain a “togetherness,” that is, to be unified in the truth and living it out before a watching world.

...according to the proper working of each individual part – Here Paul speaks of the activity of each individual part, i.e., each one who makes up the local assembly of believers, the *ekklesia*. This reminds one of the words Paul uses in v. 7 of our chapter, where he writes:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Messiah’s gift. (Eph 4:7)

The words “proper working” translate μέτρον (*metron*) which carries the sense of “measure” or “quantity.” Thus, each believer is given the ability to function within the body as enabled and gifted by the Spirit. Thus, the “proper working of each individual part” is governed by how Messiah has gifted each believer to function within the body. Not everyone is equipped to do everything, but each is gifted to fulfill an important and necessary function within the believing community. Obviously when a person seeks to fulfill a role in the community for which he or she is not equipped, rather than having a “proper working,” negative effects occur. When each believer functions according to the measure of Messiah’s grace in gifting, then the local assembly will grow in its ability to honor Him and to show forth the surpassing greatness of His love as portrayed in the lives of His redeemed people. And this is Paul’s point in the concluding statement of this paragraph which he began in v. 11.

...causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. – When the believing members of the body of Messiah function in unity with each other, each one contributing in accordance to the grace of God’s gifting, the body is built up “in love,” ἐν ἀγάπῃ (*en agapē*). This Greek word, *agapē*, has become well known in our times. But it is worth emphasizing that it became a word that characterized the early followers of Yeshua, describing “love” in the sense of giving to others without the expectation of receiving something in return. For Yeshua gave Himself and He needed nothing, for He is the owner of all things. Thus, to walk in His footsteps is to love others as He loved us, that is, giving without the expectation or requirement of receiving something in return. Note

Paul's words in his epistle to the Philippians.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (Phil 2:3)

In these words we see the essential component that must exist if the local assembly of believers is to continually be building itself up in love, and that component is "humility of mind" by which we are truly enabled to serve others. As F. F. Bruce notes,

...it is indeed from the living Christ that his people receive (through the Spirit) all that they need to make them effectively his people.

This is true of his people as a whole, and it is true of each individual believer. The body "grows effectively" by the inner strength that he supplies "according to the due measure of each separate part." Each one functions best in union with him and with the others. The bond that unites the members one with another is the bond of love, the love of Christ constraining them (2 Cor. 5:14) so that only by love can the body be built up to his stature.<sup>1</sup>

**17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,**

Having given his treatise on the unity of the body of Messiah and its utter necessity for the community of believers to grow and fulfill the mission of the *ekklesia*, Paul now resumes the thought of the opening verses of this chapter.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:1-3)

The language Paul uses here as he returns to his opening exhortation is emphatic. He starts with the common verb "I say" (λέγω, *legō*) but then adds "and affirm." The Greek word translated here as "affirm" is μαρτύρομαι (*marturomai*) which carries the sense of "witness," "insist,"

<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Ephesians*, p. 353.

or “implore.”<sup>1</sup> And then he adds a third component “together with the Lord,” giving utter gravity to his exhortation here.

...*that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk* – Here we have an excellent example of the Apostolic teaching showing that those who are truly born from above will not be characterized by a life-style that matches that of the unbelieving world. True saving faith in Yeshua is always manifested by a change in the way the believer lives.

This is what Paul means by using the common term “walk” to describe the pattern of one’s life, a meaning of the word which is decidedly Pauline.<sup>2</sup> It answers to the same use of the Hebrew הָלַךְ (*halach*) as, for example, in Is 33:15 and Ps 15:2.

He who walks righteously and speaks with sincerity, he who rejects unjust gain and shakes his hands so that they hold no bribe; he who stops his ears from hearing about bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking upon evil. (Is 33:15)

He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. (Ps 15:2)

...*that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind*, – Here the term “the Gentiles” (τὰ ἔθνη, *ta ethnē*) is used to denote unbelievers in general, for the Greek word *ethnē* can also denote “nations” and particularly “nations” as other than Israel. In the Tanach, “the nations” are often characterized by idolatry. The Gentile believers to whom Paul is addressing himself would still be known as coming to Yeshua “from the nations,” i.e., Gentiles, and having been gathered into the believing remnant of Israel, represent the promise of God that in the Seed of Abraham “all the nations of the earth would be blessed.” Those of the nations who have been changed through the grace of God in Yeshua and by faith coming into union with Him, have a manner of life that is diametrically opposed to that which characterized their former life of sin.

Paul notes four problems characteristic of unbelieving Gentiles in the Hellenistic world. First, they “walk in the futility of their mind.” The Greek adjective translated “futility” is μάταιος (*mataios*) and carries the sense of “idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, lacking truth.”<sup>3</sup>

1 BDAG, p. 619.

2 The verb “to walk” used to denote “manner of life” is found 30x in the Pauline Epistles.

3 BDAG, p. 621.

Interestingly, the Lxx uses this same word to describe “idols” in Jer 2:5, 8:19.

Thus says the LORD, “What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?” (Jer 2:5)

Behold, listen! The cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land: “Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not within her? Why have they provoked Me with their graven images, with foreign idols?” [ματαίους ἄλλοτρίους] (Jer 8:19)

It may well be, then, that when Paul speaks of the unbelieving Gentiles living “in the futility of their mind,” he is describing them as idol worshipers who put their hopes in what they have fashioned with their own minds, having rejected the clear witness of creation which testifies of the God Who is the Creator.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Rom 1:20–21)

**18–19 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.**

The second problem Paul enumerates which characterizes the unbelieving Gentile is that they are “darkened in their understanding.” The construction of the Greek phrase (ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ ὄντες), utilizing the present participle ὄντες (*ontes*, translated “being”) which can indicate cause, points to the cause of their futile thinking, namely, that they exist in darkness, which symbolizes a lack of saving knowledge. Paul will use this metaphor of “darkness” three more times in Ephesians (5:8, 11; 6:12) finally connecting it with the work of evil spirits.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12)

It is the enemy who seeks to hide the light of the truth from those who are perishing.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Messiah, who is the image of God. (2Cor 4:3–4)

The third thing that characterizes the unbelieving Gentiles is that they are “excluded from the life of God” (*ἀπαλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ θεοῦ*). This same verb, *ἀπαλλοτριόω* (*apallotriōō*), in the same form (perfect participle) is found in 2:12, describing the former life of the Gentile believers to whom Paul is writing, marking the stark contrast between their present life in Messiah and their helpless estate before the light of the Gospel shone upon them.

remember that you were at that time separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph 2:12)

To “walk” or “live” as though they were still in that darkened place is therefore unthinkable and repugnant.

The cause of such darkness is two-fold. First, the unbelieving Gentiles live in the realm of ignorance, for their eyes have been blinded to the light of the gospel. Second, their hearts have been hardened and are therefore unreceptive to the evidence of God’s existence that is all around them. Apart from God’s gracious intervention, they have no hope.

The fourth thing that characterizes the unbelieving Gentiles is that they have “become callous” (*οἵτινες ἀπηλγηκότες, hoitines apēlgēkotes*). The verb translated “callous” (*ἀπαλγέω, apalgēō*) is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and carries the sense of “dead to feeling,” which is used metaphorically to mean “to be so injured that one is not bothered by the implications of what one is doing.”<sup>1</sup> Much like what happens when one loses all sense of feeling in one’s finger, they run the risk of severely injuring that finger without knowing it.

Such callousness in terms of one’s manner of life gives them “over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

1 BDAG, p. 96.

Not only have they chosen a life-style that is injurious to them in every aspect of their living, but they are greedy to get as much of the impurity as possible. Such a life of utter disregard for God and His glory is the direct opposite of what characterizes the lives of the children of God who are growing in holiness and in gratitude for the salvation procured for them at the great cost of Yeshua's own suffering and death.

If then, those who are born from above are likewise gathered together into the body of Messiah, how careful must we be to walk as children of light and thereby to love each other by helping each other mature in our faith that we might indeed be genuine lights for Yeshua in this dark world. This is the ultimate goal of the *ekklesia*, that Yeshua would receive the glory and honor He deserves.