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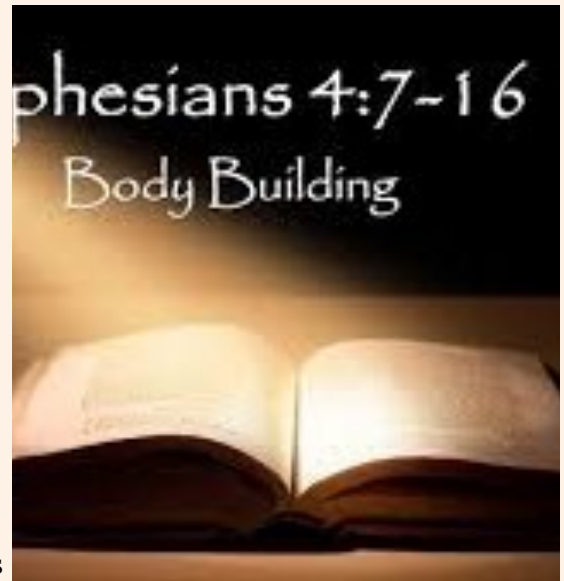
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The Growth of the Body

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.’ (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work

of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:7-16



In this section of Ephesians Paul unfolds the grand purpose that Christ has for the growth of his body, the church. He informs us that Jesus has given gifts to the members of his body that he intends for each of us to use for the good of the whole body. When we do, the church will grow up in Christ in love. We will not be just an organization, but we will be the body of Christ.

Grace According to Christ’s Gift

First, we note that the gifts referred to here, whatever they are, are distributed according to the measure of Christ. It is not according to what the recipient might want, but it is according to what Christ determines to be the need for his church. What are the gifts referred to here? Coffman and others say that he is talking about ordinary “graces” and not the miraculous gifts that we read about in other places. The time of the miraculous, confirming gifts was drawing to a close. When the word of God was completed and confirmed, these miraculous signs ceased.

Paul said in 1 Cor. 13:8-13:

Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But

when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

Paul was speaking here of miraculous prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. He certainly didn't mean we would cease to have languages, but what he did mean is that the "gift of tongues", that is, the ability to speak another language without studying it, would cease. On the day of Pentecost all of those from various parts of the world heard the Apostles speaking in their own native languages in the nations where they lived. This was the miraculous tongue or language that would cease.

Paul goes on to describe the "gifts" as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. We emphasize again that these gifts are distributed according to Christ's measure and not according to human desire.

He Led Captivity Captive

Some say that Paul was quoting from Psa. 68:18 here. The context of Psa. 68 is that of a conquering king bringing captives home, extracting from them tribute and then distributing to his faithful servants. Psa. 68:17-19:

The chariots of God *are* twenty thousand,
Even thousands of thousands;
The Lord is among them *as in* Sinai, in the Holy Place.
You have ascended on high,
You have led captivity captive;
You have received gifts among men,
Even from the rebellious,
That the Lord God might dwell *there*.
Blessed *be* the Lord,
Who daily loads us *with benefits*,
The God of our salvation! *Selah*
Our God *is* the God of salvation;
And to God the Lord *belong* escapes from death.

As Coffman and other commentators have noted, Paul was not quoting Psalm 68 verbatim, but he was starting from here to write a new scripture

about the conquering Christ. Christ is represented as the mighty conqueror, leading in his train of captives "captivity" itself, a personification of all of the bondage which oppresses human life, such as "captivity to death," the imprisonment of our mortality, "the captivity to sin" (2 Timothy 2:26), etc.

In 2 Tim. 2:26, Paul depicts the servant of the Lord gently teaching the lost with much patience and humility so that "...they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." The church's mission is to rescue the lost, those who have been taken captive by the devil. The church in preaching the truth provides freedom from the captivity of sin.

The writer of Hebrews also affirms that release from bondage is a part of what Christ has done for the believer. Heb. 2:14-15: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

What about the ascending and descending mentioned here? The ascension referred to here is Christ's return to the right hand of God after his resurrection. Peter proclaimed in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost: "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

'The Lord said to my Lord,
"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:32-36)

Of course, Christ could not ascend unless he had first descended. Paul wrote to the Philippians in Phil. 2:5-11:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There was a period of time when miraculous gifts and signs were in order. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, "When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." As the church matured and as the inspired word was written and confirmed, the miraculous signs ceased, but the ordinary "grace" of God continues even to this day.

Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers

The only gifts mentioned in the context of this passage are these positions of leadership in the church. F. F. Bruce comments on this passage:

...there are two pairs of offices in view here: (1) apostles and prophets, and (2) evangelists and pastor-teachers. The first pair were effective in the founding of the church, and the second pair are required in all generations. The omission of "some" before "teachers" indicates that the meaning is teaching-pastors, or pastor-teachers. The failure of some to see that the word "pastor" is a New Testament synonym for "elder" or "bishop" has led to some rather fanciful comments, such as: "The fact that neither bishops nor elders are mentioned is an indication that we are still some distance removed from the developed organization that we find around the turn of the first century. (Francis W. Beare)"

All kinds of scholarly misconceptions are evident in a remark like the above. The "organization" of the Lord's church did not "develop" but was given from the very first.

Paul ordained elders among the churches established on his first missionary tour (Acts 14:23). In fact, the verse before us says: "He gave," that is, the Lord gave the offices mentioned, including that of elder or bishop, called here pastor-teachers.

We have the same Apostles and Prophets that we have always had. If this is not true, then we are on a faulty foundation. Remember Paul taught in Eph. 2:20 that we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone. We don't have any new apostles, and we don't have any new prophets, and we certainly don't have a new Christ.

The offices in the Lord's church today are Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers. It is important to note that in the NT our English words Pastor, Elder, Shepherd, Bishop, Overseer, and Presbyter all refer to the same office in the church, what we commonly call an Elder. We do have men who are capable public teachers of the word who may not hold the office of an Elder.

What is an Evangelist? A simple definition is "a person who seeks to convert others to the Christian faith, especially by public preaching." Other definitions given in a dictionary today might be: 1. a Protestant minister or layperson who serves as an itinerant or special preacher, especially a revivalist. a preacher of the gospel. 2. any of the writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) of the four Gospels. 3. (in the primitive church) a person who first brought the gospel to a city or region. 4. a person marked by evangelical enthusiasm for or support of any cause.

In the early church Evangelists like Timothy, Titus and others were companions of Paul and were sent with letters to churches and were instructed to help set things in order in congregations of the Lord's people. We usually equate the word today with someone on television or in a stadium who is preaching the gospel.

There is another word found often in the scripture that is sometimes translated Deacon and sometimes Minister. It is the Greek word *diakonos*.

Strong's 1249 *diákonos* (from 1223 *diá*, "thoroughly" and *konis*, "dust") – properly, "thoroughly raise up dust by moving in a hurry, and so to *minister*" (*WP*, 1,

162); *ministry* (sacred service). in the NT usually refers to the Lord inspiring His servants to carry out His plan for His people – i.e. as His "minister" (like a *deacon* serving Him in a local church). This is according to some word studies.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says διάκονος, διακονου, ό, ή (of uncertain origin, but by no means, as was formerly thought, compounded of διά and κόνις, so as to mean, properly, 'raising dust by hastening'; cf. ἐγκόνειν; for the alpha in the preposition διά is short, in διάκονος, long. Alexander Buttmann (1873) Lexil. i., p. 218ff (English translation, p. 231f) thinks it is derived from the obsolete διάκω equivalent to διήκω (allied with διώκω; cf. Vanicek, p. 363)); one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master; a sergeant, attendant, minister; 1. universally: of the servant of a king.

As we will see in the next verses in our text today, the purpose for the giving of evangelists and pastors and teachers is the building up of the body of Christ so that it becomes a self-edifying body unified in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

Equipping the Saints

The purpose stated here for the giving of the gifts is to equip the saints for the work of ministry. As we noted earlier in this study the word "saint" refers to all Christians and not to just a select group of super Christians. In 1 Cor. 12 and in Rom. 12 Paul talks about the body of Christ, the church, and compares it to our physical body. In both books he emphasizes the fact that the gifts given to the members of the body, whether supernatural or natural, are for the profit of the whole body.

1 Cor. 12:4-7: There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*.

Rom. 12:3-8: For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the mem-

bers do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Ephesian 4:13 teaches us that the purpose for the equipping of the saints is that so we might attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Verse 14 cautions us that we are to be careful not to be carried away with every wind of doctrine like a little child. We are to grow to maturity and to be grounded in the truth of God's word. Coffman's Commentary has this on v. 14:

There are two things which contribute to the seduction of Christians away from the holy faith. These are: (1) the natural instability of many persons who are captivated by novelty, easily misled, swayed by popular fashion, etc. As Barclay said of such people, "They are always under the influence of the last person with whom they talked." (2) Then there are the deceivers themselves, ruthless, cunning, unprincipled sons of the devil who, while often appearing in sheep's clothing, are nevertheless "ravening wolves." The language Paul used here makes any apology for the deceivers a gratuitous endorsement of evil. Note: Our translation is inadequate. The meaning is: "They make use of every shifting device to mislead" (Weymouth). There are not only those around you who lead you astray but mean to do it (Moule). They lay deliberate traps on purpose to guide you away from Christ whom they do not love. The greatest mistake that any Christian can make is to assume that teachers of error are sincere. While true enough that some of them are, it is equally true that many are not.

Verse 15 is a call for us to be sincere and kind; we are to speak the truth in love. We cannot withhold the truth because we fear someone will accuse us of not loving them. And we cannot use the truth in a way that is harsh and detrimental to those we are trying to teach.

Verse 16 makes it clear that every single member of the body of Christ has a role to play. Each one

has a gift to use for the good of the whole body. Every part is to do its share.

Paul concludes this section with this great truth: when every part does its share, it results in the growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. What a beautiful picture we are given here of what the Lord intends for the church to be. May

God help us to fulfill his purpose in the growth of the body, the church.

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Sources: Burton Coffman Commentary

Help All Around

“Brother Frank” is how he is known at our church. He’s well into his 90’s, and has been through more in his life than several of us put together have experienced. His attitude is always a “10” on a scale of positivity and joy. No wonder he’s so beloved among our church family.

We were horrified when he fell at Bible study recently. He had suffered falls before, and each time had bounced back. But as one grows older, “bouncing back” is more of a challenge.

If Brother Frank had to fall, he couldn’t have chosen a better place. Our congregation is blessed with several medical professionals, in addition to the caring individuals you’d expect to find in a church. Frank was immediately surrounded with help, and today he is on his way to recovery.

Help comes in different forms, and church is usually an excellent place to find it. I’ve seen people assisted in times of grief following the death of loved ones; others who needed help following the loss of a job; some who have experienced family trauma (divorce) have found help all around in their church family.

The church I serve is not exceptional; we’re just trying to live the life Christ teaches us to live. What a blessing that life can be!

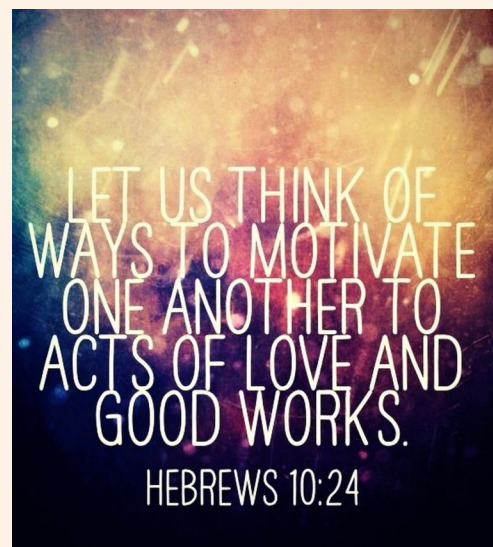
A succinct statement of Christ’s teaching on this point was given by Paul in Galatians 6:10: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” “Household” is virtually the same idea as “family”. In the Lord’s mind, that’s what church should be; not just an organization or an institution, but a family who love and care for one another.

To get a really good idea of the life Christ teaches us to live, read Romans 12:9-21. Some excerpts from that passage: “Let love be without hypocrisy ... Be kindly affectionate to one another ... distributing to the needs of the saints ... Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep ... Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” Those are phrases that describe a healthy family.

Jesus was once told that His mother and brothers were outside calling for Him. He then posed the question: “Who is My mother and who are My brothers? ... For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:48,50). To follow Christ is to be part of His family.

And when you’re part of Christ’s family, there’s help all around!

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