

Ephesians 4a Walk in Unity

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Overview

See overview chart to situate this in the entire book.

4:1-6:20 focuses on the practical side of the believer's life, introduced as

- 1:18, "the hope of his calling," subjective calling, the hope to which he has called you (cf. 4:4, "hope of your calling," objective genitive, the hope to which you are called)
- 3:19, "the fulness of God"

These practical exhortations fall into two groups, corresponding to the two main doctrinal sections of the epistle so far:

- 4:1-6:9 emphasize exhortations for unity with other believers, corresponding to the doctrine on unity in 2:11-3:13.
- 6:10-20 emphasize exhortations for combat against the forces of Satan, corresponding to the doctrine on power in 1:20-2:10.

4:1-6:9 in turn has three sections, each introduced by an exhortation to "walk" in a certain way:

- 4:1 exhorts us to "walk worthy of the vocation with which ye are called," introducing the entire section as well as the first part on Christian unity.
- 4:17, "walk not as other Gentiles walk," introduces a section on prohibitions, worldly behavior that is not to characterize the Christian.
- 5:8, "walk as children of light," with a reprise in 5:15 after a transitional section, introduces positive exhortations to godliness.

In this study, we focus on 4:1-16, "Walk in Unity." This is clearly the practical implications of the emphasis we have already seen on God's united inheritance in the church, made up of Jew and Gentile together. The word "unity" *henot8s* occurs only in 4:3,13 in the entire NT.

- 4:3 describes "the unity of the Spirit," which we already have and are exhorted to preserve.
- 4:13 describes "the unity of the faith," unto which we are to come

Structure:

- Begin by reviewing the introduction in 4:1 to the practical half of the book.
- 2-6 outlines the Nature of our Unity, in its outward manifestation and its theological foundation.
- 7-16 describes the Means of Reaching Unity, through the diversity of gifts that God has given to his children. Like a nut and bolt; they hold firmly together precisely because they are different, in the right sort of way. Their differences enable them to make up a greater, more integrated whole.

1, Paul's Exhortation

Prisoner of the Lord.—Cf. 3:1, “prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Shows that he was heading in this direction at the beginning of the last chapter, when he decided at the last moment to expound the mystery nature of the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church.

Robinson notes that the shift from “Christ” to “Lord” is significant.

- “Christ” emphasizes his role in bringing us to God (“Created in Christ Jesus”).
- “Lord” focuses on the consequences of his work in our life in this world (“be strong in the Lord”).
- As the “prisoner of Jesus Christ,” Paul was entrusted with the revelation of the mystery (ch. 3).
- As the “prisoner of the Lord,” he exhorts the believers on the basis of his own godly walk.

Beseech.—*parakalew*, also translated “comfort, exhort.” This is not a dry abstract lecture, but the pouring out of his heart in love to them. This phrase is the sign of the transition from doctrinal to practical at Rom 12:1, 1 Thes 4:1.

Cf. Heb 3:13; we are to do this to one another, “speaking the truth in love.” Our relation to one another in the church is neither impersonal moralizing nor hands-off laissez-faire, but a compassionate concern that each of us would walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.

2-6, The Nature of Christian Unity

Paul describes how this unity is manifested, and then expounds on its foundation.

2-3, *Its Outward Manifestation*

Four statements of what it means to “walk worthy.” Each builds on the previous one.

With all lowliness and meekness.—We begin with our attitude about ourselves, recognizing our lowly condition. These are the characteristics of the Lord Jesus, Matt 11:29, “meek and lowly in heart.”

- “Lowliness” (sometimes translated “humility”) is an accurate assessment of ourselves, thinking ourselves to be lowly because in fact we are, as the Scriptures reveal. It is defined by contrast with “vainglory” and “better than” in Phil 2:3, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind <5012> let each esteem other better than themselves.*”
- “Meekness” is often associated with the correct attitude to have in correcting another, 1 Cor 4:21; 2 Cor 10:1; *Gal 6:1; *2 Tim 2:25, and is frequently paired with “gentleness.”

The association of these two with one another shows that true lowliness is not obsequiousness, but a sober appreciation of our own limitations. Our awareness of our own sinfulness contributes to this attitude, but our Lord was meek and lowly without being a sinner. Fundamentally, it is the realization that I am a creature, with all the dependencies and limitations that this implies.

There are two errors to avoid in understanding these virtues.

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1. There is a curious species of pride that delights in depression and self-abnegation, putting oneself down; “I am more humble than you are.” This attitude, like every expression of the “lying tongue,” is an abomination to the Lord. True humility is an honest self-assessment, and will be coupled with an honest assessment of others as well. I recognize that I am a sinner because Scripture teaches it, but Scripture also teaches that “all have sinned.” I know I am a creature from the Bible, but the Bible includes all in this category. The point is that our reference point is first of all the Lord.
2. Lowliness and meekness is not inconsistent with glorying and confidence; cf. Phil 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me”; Gal 6:14, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God empties us of ourselves so that he might fill us with himself. We have not entered fully into the appreciation of these virtues until we are rejoicing in how completely God provides for us. “Emptied that thou shouldest fill me...Channels only,” # 387.

With longsuffering.—Patience toward people rather than circumstances; opposite is “wrath, revenge.” This is what God is with us (Rom 2:4; 9:22). This attitude builds on our lowliness and meekness:

- As lowly, we recognize that we have no independent standing to avenge ourselves.
- As filled with God, the only important offence is that which is against him, and by his own example he has shown us how he wants us to respond.

Forbearing one another in love.—“Endure,” “suffer.” This adds to the previous virtue the source from which it springs: “in love.” “Love suffereth long, and is kind,” 1 Cor 13:4. Cf. Phil 2:2, where love is the foundation for our lowliness before one another. We do not prefer one another just because we know ourselves to be nothing; we know them to be nothing, too. We prefer one another because we love them.

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.—We already have the unity of the Spirit, by virtue of being members of the body of Christ. The exhortation is that we would strive diligently to preserve that unity, to live in the good of it.

4-6, Its Theological Foundation

These phrases expound the phrase “the unity of the Spirit” from the last verse. These are all things that we already possess and that we are exhorted to preserve.

Note the trinitarian structure, which divides the paragraph into three parts. The emphasis throughout is on what we share in common with all believers. These common things thus urge us to recognize our essential unity with all of whom these things are true.

Spirit.—There is only one HS, so those in whom he works are naturally united. And the Spirit does work with us, in two ways.

- It is the Spirit who places us into the body, 1 Cor 12:13, “for by one spirit are we all baptized into one body.” Here and in 1 Cor 12:13, we are reminded that there is only one body. The metaphor does not describe the local assembly, or any denominational organization, but the true believers of all ages, who together make up the body of Christ in this world.

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- It is the Spirit who calls us to the Lord; cf. John 16:8. The hope to which he calls us is one, what 3:19 called “the fulness of God.”

But in contrast with the trinitarian *structure*, note the *emphasis* implied by the order: not “spirit, body, calling,” but “body, Spirit, calling.” His point is intensely practical, the unity of the believers in one body, and that is where he begins.

Lord.—There is only one savior. The argument is the same as in 1 Cor 1:12,13. “Is Christ divided?” Of course not. Then all who are in him must be one. Here the associations are:

- One faith, that is, one body of truth to be believed. We find this, not in the teachings of any individual or group, but in the Scriptures. All who believe that their sins are forgiven through faith in him partake of that one faith. It is significant that this is associated with “one Lord,” reminding us that he is the center of all doctrine, and that nothing is correctly understood until it is understood of him. There are many details that might engage our attention, and over which we might disagree, but the fundamental issue is what we think of Christ. <<probably not—see comments on v.13 below>>
- One baptism. The focus is not on the mode, but on the fact that we are baptized into the one Lord, Rom 6.

God and Father.—His final appeal is to the one creator of the world. A great deal of Christian orthodoxy boils down to recognizing that God is God and we are just his creatures; he is the potter and we are the clay. Paul proclaims his universality in three phrases:

- “Above all”: no one is superior to him.
- “Through all”: he works through everyone, and no one is able to hinder or block him. He causes the wrath of man to praise him, Ps 76:10.
- “In you all” (actually, MT has “in us all”): he actually dwells in those who are his children. The previous two are true of everybody, saved or not, but this expression is restricted to the believers. There is a sense in which he is “father of all,” but a special sense in which he is the particular property of his people.

7-16, The Means of Reaching Unity

Through the interaction of the diversity of gifts that the Lord has placed in the body. Compare Rom. 12, which also begins the hortatory section of that epistle with an exposition of our unity in diversity through the gifts of the Spirit.

This paragraph is an exposition of two words from Ps 68:18.

Consider first the original context:

The Psalm celebrates God’s victory in war (7-14, perhaps the conquest of Canaan), and his triumphal ascent to his holy hill of Zion (15-18); may have been written when David brought the Ark of the Covenant from the house of Obed-Edom up to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6).

v.18 is the cry of praise from the watching crowd, as God, their triumphant king, ascends the hill, followed by a host of captives (cf. the same expression in Judg 5:12), and receiving gifts (tribute) “among men.”

Paul applies this to our Lord's ascent to heaven after his victory. There are three elements in the verse ("ascend," "captivity captive," and "gave"). He expounds the first and last explicitly, and the central one fits into those explanations.

9-10, Exposition of "he ascended"

The Psalm discussed the ascent of God, represented by the Ark, to Mount Zion. Paul sees that as a picture of Christ's ascent to heaven.

Where did he ascend?—Paul develops the picture of movement by a contrast with his descent, alluding to the well-known truth that the Lord Jesus first descended from heaven to earth, and then returned to heaven: John 3:13; 16:28.

Paul's language has led to much controversy.

- This verse is the origin of the clause in the Apostles' Creed, "he descended into hell." Some suppose that "the lower parts of the earth" refers to the realm of the dead, where they think he went to deliver the OT saints. Apart from a misunderstanding of 1 Pet 3:19, this idea is without parallel in the Bible, and in fact contradicts the literal teaching of Psa 16:10, quoted by Peter of our Lord in Acts 2, "thou will not abandon my soul to hell."
- It is much better to understand the expression "lower parts of the earth" as appositional genitive, like "the sign of circumcision," here, "the lower parts, that is, the earth." Then it would refer to incarnation, as in Ps 139:15, or at most to our Lord's burial, cf. Ps 63:9.

Why did he ascend?—"that he might fill all things." This reminds us of the role of Christ as the Divine Fulfiller:

- 1:10, responsibility for the fulness of times has been assigned to him;
- 1:23, we are the means by which he accomplishes this fulness;
- 3:19, this section (4-6) is about how we are to be filled with all the fulness of God.

Cf. Jer 23:24, " 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' saith the Lord." Our Lord did not leave the earth to abandon it, but that he might more effectively take control of and fill it. The means of this filling we shall shortly see.

"He led captivity captive."

"Captivity" does not refer to the abstract idea, but to a host of captives. Col 2:15 is an important clue to his meaning, in view of the closeness in time between the two epistles.

- The enemies are "principalities and powers," a common reference to evil spiritual beings (cf. 6:12, "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers").
- God has taken spoil from them by delivering us from their control; cf. Col 2:13. Thus we are the spoil.
- God has "triumphed over them in it/him."
 - Probably "in him," that is, "in Christ," rather than a reference to the cross.
 - "Triumphed" is a technical term, meaning, "lead in triumphal procession."

Thus it is likely that Paul has these same details in view here.

- The captives chained behind our Lord as he ascends into heaven are not the OT saints delivered from hades, but the powers of darkness, defeated at the cross (cf. Jn 12:31; 16:11).
- The spoil taken from them, the “gifts received among men,” are themselves men, the persons of the redeemed.

11-16, Exposition of “he gave”

Instead of the Psalm’s “received gifts among men,” Paul writes, “gave gifts unto men.” To understand the shift, we must recognize that Tribute is received from the enemy in order to be distributed to one’s own people (cf. Ps 68:12, and the principle established by David in 1 Sam 30:21-31). Where the Psalmist focuses on God’s *receipt* of tribute from the vanquished, Paul focuses on the next step, the *distribution* of that tribute to God’s own people.

But what is the tribute? It is redeemed people, delivered from the now-captive principalities and powers. And that is what Paul goes on to say: “He gave some, apostles,” that is, he gave some people in the role of apostles to the church. The gift is the *person*, not just the *spiritual capability*. Having delivered these individuals from Satan, and endowed them by his Spirit, he now gives them back to the church at large as his special gifts.

This beautiful image applies to all believers, for each of us has a gift from the Lord for the benefit of the body (v.7; 1 Cor 7:7). Here, Paul focuses on four specific categories of gifted men, and their function in the church.

11, What are the gifts?

Paul singles out four categories of gifted man: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers (the last two describing a single role).

Apostles.—Literally, a “sent one.” The NT recognizes three uses of the term:

- There is one apostle of the Father, our Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:1), sent from the Father to bring us salvation.
- Those whom the Lord Jesus sent out personally are “apostles of Christ,” 1 Thes 2:6. Cf. the emphasis in Acts 1:21-26 on the need to have seen the risen Christ, and Paul’s claim of the same credential in 1 Cor 9:1.
- Others who had not seen the Lord are called “apostles,” cf. 2 Cor 8:23; Phil 2:25. These are said to be apostles of the churches, sent out by the church. The means by which this happens is illustrated in Acts 13:1-3; it is under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and thus they may be termed “apostles of the Spirit.”

A characteristic of someone who is sent is that he is on the move, traveling to carry out his mission. Their primary function in the NT is planting churches.

Prophets.—Literally, one who speaks for another, as we can see in the illustration God gave Moses in Ex 7:1. Specifically, the prophet speaks for God. Acts 13:1 recognizes their function alongside teachers in the church in Antioch, and 1 Cor 14 envisions prophecy as an important function in the local assembly.

Evangelists.—One who spreads the good news. This gift thus focuses on challenging unbelievers with the gospel. Its role is to bring them into the church. We have two examples in the NT:

- Philip, called “the evangelist” in Acts 21:8. Recall that his distinctive work in Acts 8:5, 26, 40 is itinerant. In this he resembles the apostles.
- Timothy, 2 Tim 4:5, who visits young churches and helps set up their structure (appointing elders and deacons) (cf. 1 Tim 1:3,4; 3:1-13; 5:17-25).

Leads to a question: what is the difference between an apostle and an evangelist?

Pastors and Teachers.—“Pastor” literally means “shepherd,” one who tends sheep. “Teacher” is the interpretation of this metaphor. The “pastor” feeds God’s people by teaching them from the Word of God. Why not just “teacher”? To emphasize that the teaching is not that of a university professor, with a view solely to fill the mind, but rather part of the integrated care given by a shepherd to his sheep. Cf. Heb 13:17, “they watch for your souls,” a term that in the NT refers to the entire life-experience.

Again a question: how is this different from the “prophet,” who also delivers the Word of God to people?

Synthesis.—The clue may be to realize that the apostles and prophets are described as the ones who laid the foundation (2:20). They appear to be first-century gifts, while “evangelist” and “pastor-teacher” come later. Within each generation we have one itinerant category, the church planter (apostle, evangelist), and one resident category, the church builder (prophet, pastor-teacher). Thus:

	Foundation	Superstructure
Itinerant (planter)	Apostle	Evangelist
Resident (builder)	Prophet	Pastor-Teacher

12, How do they function?

Our version has the same preposition in each of the three phrases: “**For** the perfecting of the saints, **for** the work of the ministry, **for** the edifying of the body of Christ.”

But in fact the first is different from the second two, and we could better render, “**For** the perfecting of the saints, **unto** the work of the ministry, **unto** the edifying of the body of Christ.” The difference is critical: the second and third phrases describe the work, not of the four categories of gifted men, but of all in the church.

For the perfecting of the saints.—Not *teleios*, derived from *telos* “end, goal,” which has reference to a completed process, thus, maturity (cf. Heb. 5:14 “full age”); this word will come to the fore in v.13 “a perfect man.” Here rather we have *katartismos*, referring to structural rather than chronological completeness, all of the parts being brought together to work as they should:

- the verb is used in secular literature of mending a broken bone
- Matt 4:21, mending nets
- God’s creation of the cosmos (Heb 11:3) or of a human body (Heb 10:5)

Calvin uses the words “settlement” and “constitution,” as though the church were a society whose parts need to be constituted or brought into alignment by the regular rule of law. Maybe we should prefer “alignment.”

This is the distinctive role of the four gifts specifically named, all of which focus on conveying the Word of God to people. Some occurrences in the epistles suggest how the gifted men are to exercise this ministry:

- 1 Cor 1:10 “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be **perfectly joined together** in the same mind and in the same judgment.”—The emphasis on “same mind and same judgment” shows why this is appropriate to the teacher. By opening the Scriptures to them, he needs to help believers come to agreement on the basic points of their faith and how they should live as a consequence. Cf. 2 Cor 13:11 also for this relation of the word to peace and one mind among the believers. The relation of this to the work of the teacher: Paul’s focus is that the Corinthians might have “the same mind and the same judgment.”
- 1 Thes 3:10, Paul’s desire to “**perfect** that which is lacking in your faith”—the role of the teacher, helping people have a complete and harmonious mental concept of the work of the Lord.

This (and the two phrases that follow) flow from the teaching of the Word of God, the work of the evangelist and pastor-teacher, which is why we give such a high priority to this focus in our meetings.

Unto the work of the ministry.—“Ministry” is *diakonia*, the work of a *diakonos* or servant. As the four gifts constitute God’s people into a unified body, the members—all of them—are to serve one another. Examples of this term:

- Luke 10:40, what Martha did for the Lord
- Acts 6:1, the distribution of food to the widows, entrusted to the Seven (thus their name, “deacons”).
- Acts 11:29; 12:25; Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12, 13, a term for material aid given to other believers.
- Acts 6:4; 20:24, and often, the delivery of a message (e.g., the gospel).

We should be like the house of Stephanas in 1 Cor 16:15, “addicted” to the ministry of the saints.

Unto the edifying of the body of Christ.—The gifted men align the saints so that they can minister to one another. What is the point of this ministry? The edification of the body of Christ. Merges two idioms:

- “edification” refers to the construction of an “edifice,” a building, and reflects the image of the church as a temple at the end of ch. 2.
- “body” is a biological metaphor.

Note what is to be edified: not the individual, but the body of Christ. The point, as in 2:19-22, is not individual growth, but that we are built up together, more tightly unified and more effective in our joint life. Perhaps Paul’s point is related to our Lord’s prayer in John 17:23, that our love

and care for one another would attract unbelievers to us, and build them too into the body of Christ. Cf. Rom 15:20, where Paul describes his evangelistic work as “building.”

Excursus: See additional paper on “Edification in the NT.” We often hear the word “edify” or “edification” applied personally. “I had a great quiet time this AM; the Lord really edified me.” It is questionable whether this idea (isolated edification of the individual) occurs anywhere in the NT. To check this, I reviewed all the uses of oikodomew (Strong’s 3618), oikodom8 (3619), and oikodomia (3620). While some texts may be read this way in isolation, the overall usage of the word suggests that it should be understood organically: not building up an individual, but building an individual into a larger entity (the church, the body of Christ). Evidence:

- *The overwhelming use of the word family (31 verses out of 58) is in reference to the construction of a literal building. The semantic presence of oiko- as a structure is very strong. With one exception, this is the only sense in which our Saviour uses the word family.*
- *His one exception is Matt 16:18, with reference to edifying the church. Thus Christ never speaks of edifying the individual. The largest group of reference in Acts and the Epistles (10 vv) refer explicitly to the church or the body. Two noteworthy concentrations of the term (not all explicitly referring to the church) are 1 Cor 14 (6 vv) and Ephesians (4vv).*
- *Eight uses refer to one person edifying another. Of these, three are either in 1 Cor 14 or Eph, and should be understood in reference to the focus on the church in those places, that is, of building the individual into the body. The other five certainly can be understood that way as well. This conclusion includes 1 Cor 8:10, which by chiasm with 10:15-21 is warning against building a weak believer into the idolatrous cult.*
- *Eight are unspecified, but are completely consistent with the organic sense of building an individual into the church.*
- *The one possible exception is 1 Cor 14:4, speaking of a person edifying himself. Given the heavy use of the conventional use of the word family in the context of 1 Cor 14, this should be taken as an ironic usage. The inappropriateness of this sort of behavior is precisely because edification is a corporate, not an individual, activity.*

Summary of how the gifts function:

1. The gifted men, by their loving and contextualized ministry of the Word of God, help the saints to come to a harmonious understanding of the Scriptures, both individually and as a group. They share a common vision, a common hope.
2. Thus united in faith, they care lovingly for one another.
3. This loving mutual care strengthens and extends the body of Christ, the church.

13, *How long are they active?*

This dynamic will continue until “we all,” the church as a whole, arrive at our specified destination (thus *katantaw* is used 9x in Acts). That destination is defined by three parallel clauses, all introduced by *eis* “unto.” In our version, the first has been translated “in,” but we should read all three as parallel:

unto the unity ...

Complementing the “unity of the Spirit,” which we have and which we must strive to preserve, is a unity of faith and knowledge that we shall one day attain, through the ministry of the gifted men. (Note the appropriateness of the emphasis on teaching with a view to this particular destination.) Robinson: “We are one now; in the end we all shall know ourselves to be one.”

Note that “faith” is presented as an element both of the unity that we already have (v.3) and of the unity to which we aspire (v.13). How can we at once have it and aspire to it? It may help to consider in each case the other item with which it is associated.

In v.3, “one faith” is paired with “one baptism,” referring to the baptism of the HS by which we are incorporated into the body of Christ. The emphasis is thus on our entry into the Christian life. This entry is “by grace ... through faith,” 2:8. It is the only entrance, so all those who are Christ’s have in common this experience of trusting him.

Here, it is paired with “the knowledge of the Son of God.” This is regularly a mark of maturity in the Christian life:

- 1 John 2:12-14 distinguishes knowing the Father (the experience even of “little children”) with knowing “him that is from the beginning,” cf. John 1:1, the Lord Jesus.
- Phil 3:10, even late in life Paul still aspired to the knowledge of Christ.

Why is this so? Probably because we must have the experience of living a Spirit-filled life in a sinful world in order to understand what it was really like for the Son of God to live on this earth.

What then is this “unity of the faith” to which we grow? I used to think it was agreement in doctrine, and that may be part of it, especially in view of the usage of *katartis*-. But in a deeper sense, the contrast between v.3 and v.13 now seems to me to be analogous to the distinction in 1 John 5:13, which distinguishes

- those who have believed on the name of the Son of God (that is, for salvation, as outlined in 5:10-12), from
- those who trust him and draw on his strength in daily life, as outlined in 14-15.

Individually, each of us needs to reach that state of maturity in which we know by experience the life of active trust in God exemplified by the Lord Jesus during his earthly walk, and thus know him in a deeper and more personal way. But the point here goes beyond that: it is not that we attain unto faith and knowledge, but unto *unity* of faith and knowledge. What is in view is our *corporate* faith and experience, our ability as a body to know the mind of our Lord and feel at one with him. This is highlighted in the next two goals:

unto a perfect man

Two observations here.

1. “Perfect” here is from a different word family than in v.12. There, Paul focused on structural completeness, constitution, alignment. Here, we have the word that indicates “mature,” emphasizing chronological completeness.
2. Paul anticipates “a perfect man,” not “perfect men.” Again, the focus is not on individuals, but on the church.

The work of the gifted men is to bring to maturity the body of Christ, as an integral organism. How long will their work continue? Until that body is mature. The meaning of that maturity is made clear in the next phrase:

unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ

With the phrase “fulness of Christ,” cf. 1:23, “the fulness of him.” The genitive is subjective, not objective. The point is not that we are being filled by Christ, but that as we mature and grow together as the body of Christ, we are filling him. The ministry of the Word of God through the gifted men brings the church to the point that it fills Christ and becomes effective in doing his work.

The concept is so lofty that Paul scarcely dares contemplate it directly, and hedges it about with genitives, “the measure of the stature of,” much as Ezekiel did when confronted with the glory of God by the river Chebar, “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord,” 1:28.

14-16, What is their objective?

This is a “contrast paragraph,” telling first what we ought not to be, then what we ought to be. The focus turns at least partially to recognize the state of the individuals making up the body of Christ. Initially they are children, and v.14 describes the liabilities and weaknesses of children. But the point of a child is to mature, and our individual maturity is described in relation to our position in the body in 15-16.

14, Antithesis: The Confusion of Adolescence

Paul describes the condition of immature believers using a nautical metaphor. Recall that he reached Rome by way of a sea voyage that included a violent storm and a shipwreck (Acts 27), and his language here compares an immature believer to a foundering ship. There are two threats in such a situation, waves and wind, and his imagery draws on both of them.

- “Tossed to and fro”.—The verb *kludwnizomai* is derived from a word *kludwn* that refers to a billow, an exceptionally large and violent wave (not just the regular succession of waves lapping the beach, *kuma*). The sense is of someone caught by a huge wave and knocked off their feet.
- “Carried about with every wind”.—As the waves buffet the ship’s hull, the gusts of wind shake its sails, break its mast and tear its rigging.

What are the waves and gusts that so threaten the immature believer? They are doctrinal in nature, particularly doctrine that is promulgated by deliberate deceivers. We should distinguish two sorts of doctrinal error.

- One arises simply because of the limits of our understanding. We are unable to get everything together in our mind, and so may oversimplify or miss something. Such error corrects itself, through our own Bible study and in interaction with other believers.
- The other is promulgated by false teachers with some ulterior motive, and it is such that Paul describes here.

The false teachers are characterized in two ways, and these characterizations will help us distinguish the kind of person against whom Paul is here warning, from someone who is well-intentioned but perhaps misled.

- “by the sleight of men”.—“Sleight” is literally “dice,” and refers metaphorically to the adeptness by which someone cheats at dice. False teaching cleverly manipulates the scriptures to force a conclusion that does not flow naturally from the text. It is deceptive.
- “by cunning craftiness, with a view to the method of error”.—Parallel to “by the sleight of men.” This refers to the deliberateness and methodical nature of their error. AV’s rendering of the last clause is quite free, but catches the sense. They deliberately are trying to deceive. They know that their position is wrong, and want to twist people into it.

There are such false teachers in the world, and like a raging storm, they can tear apart a body of believers, confusing those who are immature and generating schism in the body. The work of the gifted men is God’s provision for avoiding this sort of disaster. Their teaching must serve as the reinforcement that keeps younger believers from being tossed about by the deceivers in the world today.

15-16, Thesis: The Goal of Growth

15 presents four points of contrast with the antithesis:

- The false teachers are external to the true church (though they usually masquerade as part of it). The actions discussed here are within the body.
- The false teachers deceive; we “speak the truth.” This is the characteristic ministry of the gifted men, and ultimately of all believers.
- The actions of the false teachers are driven by “cunning craftiness,” as they pursue their own ends. We are to speak the truth “in love,” with a primary concern for one another.
- We were vulnerable to the deception of false teachers because of our immaturity. As we speak the truth, we “grow up into him in all things,” attaining the maturity of being the body of Christ.

16: As the church matures to fill Christ and carry out his work, he remains in a distinguished position as the head of the united members of his body. Note:

- The growth of the body is an internal dynamic; the body causes itself to grow. The core of the sentence, grammatically, is “the whole body ...maketh increase of the body.”
- That growth depends on “the effectual working in the measure of every part.” Recall v.12; the gifted men articulate the saints together so that they may do the work of the ministry and the edification of the body. If I am not being all that Christ wants me to be, we as a body will fall short, and the same is true for each of us.
- Within this structure, Christ is the head. We are gathered unto him. Any competing authority or center must be avoided. The kind of risk we are to avoid is clearly seen in the parallel in Col 2:18,19, where the false teaching in view is specifically an emphasis on teaching about angels that eclipses the focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Growth flows from him: “from whom the whole body ... maketh increase.” He is the cornerstone that orients the whole building; he is the head that guides the entire body.

Summary, “Walk in Unity”

Chapter 2 emphasized the unity of the church under the vision of a building, a temple. Here the image of a body is to the fore. We are one because we are members of the one body of Christ, representing him and doing his work in the world. God has provided special gifts of evangelism and teaching to align believers with one another so that they may build up the body by their care for one another. Our daily conduct must be marked by this active care and nurturing one of another in the body of Christ.

Analysis

4:1 Parakalw^ ou)^n u(ma^s e)gw\ o(de/smios e)n kuri/w|
a)ci/ws peripath^sai th^s klh/sews h(^s e)klh/qhte,

2-6, *The Nature of Unity*

2 meta\ pa/shs tapeinofrosu/nhs kai\ prau/+thtos,

meta\ makroqumi/as,

a)nexo/menoi a)llh/lwn e)n a)ga/ph|,

3 spouda/zontes threi^ⁿ thⁿ e(no/thta tou^ pneu/matos e)n tw^| sunde/smw| th^s ei)rh/nhs:

Definition of “the unity of the Spirit”

4 e(\n sw^ma

kai\ e(\n pneu^ma,

kaqw\s kai\ e)klh/qhte e)n mia^| e)lpi/di th^s klh/sews u(mw^ⁿ:

5 ei(^s ku/rios,

mi/a pi/stis,

e(\n ba/ptisma:

6 ei(^s qeo\s kai\ path\r pa/ntwn,

o(e)pi\ pa/ntwn

kai\ dia\ pa/ntwn

kai\ e)n pa^sin hmin.

7-16, *The Means of Reaching Unity*

7 (Eni\ de\ e(ka/stw| h(mw^ⁿ e)do/qh h(xa/ris
kata\ to\ me/tron th^s dwrea^s tou^ Xristou^.

The Text

8 dio\ le/gei,

)Anaba\s ei)s u(/yos

h)|xmalw/teusen ai)xmalwsi/an,

e)/dwken do/mata toi^s a)nqrw/pois.

Exposition of “he ascended”

9 [to\ de\)Ane/bh

ti/ e)stin

ei) mh\ o(/ti kai\ kate/bh ei)s ta\ katw/tera [me/rh] th^s gh^s;
10 o(kataba\s au)to/s e)stin kai\ o(a)naba\s u(pera/nw pa/ntwn tw^ n ou)ranw^ n,
i(/na plhrw/sh| ta\ pa/nta.)

11-16, Exposition of “he gave”

11 kai\ au)to\s e)/dwken tou\s me\n a)posto/lous, tou\s de\ profh/tas, tou\s de\ eu)aggelista/s,
tou\s de\ poime/nas kai\ didaska/lous,

12, means

12 pro\s to\n katartismo\n tw^ n a(gi/wn
ei)s e)/rgon diakoni/as,
ei)s oi)kodomh\n tou^ sw/matos tou^ Xristou^,

13, duration

13 me/xri katanth/swmen oi(pa/ntes
ei)s th^n e(no/thta th^s pi/stews kai\ th^s e)pignw/sews tou^ ui(ou^ tou^ qeou^,
ei)s a)/ndra te/leion,
ei)s me/tron h(likias tou^ plhrw/matos tou^ Xristou^,

14-16, purpose: contrast paragraph

14 i(/na

14, antithesis:

mhke/ti w)^men nh/pioi,
kludwnizo/menoi
kai\ periferomenoi panti\ a)ne/mw| th^s didaskali/as
e)n th^| kubei/a| tw^ n a)nqrw/pwn
e)n panourgi/a|
pro\s th\n meqodei/an th^s pla/nhs,

15-16, thesis:

15 a)lhqeu/ontes de\ e)n a)ga/ph| au)ch/swmen ei)s au)to\n ta\ pa/nta,
o(/s e)stin h(kefalh/
Xristo/s,
16 e)c ou(^ pa^ n to\ sw^ ma ... th^n au)/chsin tou^ sw/matos poiei^ tai ei)s oi)kodomh\n
e(autou^ e)n a)ga/ph|.
sunarmologou/menon kai\ sumbibazo/menon
dia\ pa/shs a(fh^s th^s e)pixorhgi/as
kat' e)ne/rgeian e)n me/trw| e(no\s e(ka/stou me/rous