

Eph 4:11-16, How the Church Works

Introduction

There has been some discussion over the past year or so about the number, timing, and format of our meetings. There is nothing sacred about these details. We have liberty, under the leadership of the Spirit of God, to structure them to meet our needs. But there are some scriptural principles that our meetings should satisfy. So we have decided to review together, over the next few weeks, some of the basic texts on the structure and operation of the church, to guide our discussions.

We anticipate four studies. Others can be added if there are particular questions.

- This week and next, we consider from Eph 4 the basic mechanics of the church. Who does the work? How does it get done? What is the goal of this work?
- Next, from Acts 2 and Heb 10, we will consider the four main functions in the life of the church, and the attitude of the people toward them.
- One important way that the functions are addressed is through meetings of the church. So we will consider the NT revelation on these meetings.
- Finally, we should think about the Lord's day and its place in the life of the church.

Ephesians and Corinthians are paired letters, like Romans and Galatians. In each pair of letters, both deal with many of the same topics. Romans and Galatians deal with how an individual is saved, while Ephesians and 1 Corinthians deal with the corporate life of the church.

In each pair, one is more general and doctrinal, while the other deals with current problems in the church. You can see this in the signatures: Paul signs Ephesians and Romans, the general letters, alone, but associates other people with him in 1 Corinthians (Sosthenes) and Galatians (“all the brethren which are with me”), to satisfy the principle of “two or three witnesses” in cases of accusation. Ephesians and Romans are later than 1 Corinthians and Galatians, and may have resulted from Paul's Spirit-guided reflection on the practical issues he confronted in the earlier epistles.

Unlike many of the other epistles, Ephesians has no personal notes at the end, and some ancient copies lack the name “Ephesians,” suggesting that it may have been a circular letter intended for a number of the churches of Asia Minor. So we can expect its instruction to be of great importance for us.

The two great themes of Ephesians are God's power in and through us, and the unity of the believers. 4:1-16 expounds this unity. vv. 2-6 outline the *nature* of this unity, while 7-16 describe the *means* of unity. We can see the shift in focus in the two occurrences of the noun ἑνοτητα “unity” in this section, in vv. 3, 13. It appears only here in the entire NT.

- In 4:3, it describes something that we already have and are commanded to preserve, the unity of the Spirit.
- In 4:13, it describes something we do not yet have, and toward which we grow, “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”

This is just the reverse of what many churches believe. They require “unity of the faith,” assent to a doctrinal statement, in order to receive people into fellowship, then seek to grow into some sort of amorphous “spiritual unity.” We believe that true believers are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit, giving them an intrinsic unity with one another regardless of their formal beliefs, and our duty is to preserve that spiritual unity while growing together into doctrinal unity.

We focus this morning on vv. 11-16, which is one long sentence (163 words in the AV, 196 in Greek). It describes Who the distinguished individuals within the church are, How the work gets done, and then (first in summary, then in more detail) What the goal of the work is.

11, Whom does Christ Give to the Church?

The risen and ascended Christ(vv. 7-10) has given four categories of gifted men to the church. How are they related to one another?

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

These are not the only gifts in the church; compare the seven in Rom 12:6-8, or the eight in 1 Cor 12:28, or the nine in 1 Cor 12:8-10. But these are distinctive in that they are the main teaching gifts, the ones involved in public proclamation of the Word of God.

They can be distinguished in two ways.

Apostles and ... prophets were prominent in the early life of the church. In 2:20, Paul describes the church as “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.” The genitive here is probably subjective, “the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets.” The only foundation is Christ (1 Cor 3:11), but the role of the apostles and prophets was to provide, from “the many other things which Jesus did” (John 21:25) the basic truths upon which the church is based.

Evangelists and ... pastors and teachers are the gifts that are active in the mature church that emerges toward the end of Acts and is seen in the epistles.

Orthogonal to this chronological distinction is a functional one.

Apostles and Evangelists are itinerants, church planters. They take the gospel to those who have not heard it yet. Because they travel so extensively, they cannot hold regular employment, and Paul instructs concerning them (1 Cor 9:14), “they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”

Prophets and Pastor-teachers (the latter being a single gift) are resident in the local church. Thus in the early church at Antioch we see “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1), while the pastor-teacher, also called elder and overseer (AV “bishop”) is prominent throughout the later NT. It is this group whom Paul exhorts in Acts 20:33-35 to follow his example in earning their own living.

Notice that these are gifted men. This observation leads to two important distinctions.

1. We are talking about gift and function, not church office. In general pastor-teachers should hold the office of overseer, and among the overseers should be those who “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17), but Paul is concerned here about gift and function, not about organizational structure.

2. By distinguishing these people as special gifts to the church, Paul implies that they are different from the rest of the church. Not everyone is to be an evangelist in the sense here spoken of; not everyone is to be a pastor-teacher. There are other gifts (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Cor 12:8-10), and “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Cor 12:7), but Paul here focuses on two specific gifts.

I hope you will not think me puffed up if I suggest that I have been the one mainly responsible for this function at WIBC. My burden in expounding this passage to you is for us all to understand better the relation between what I do as one who feeds the flock, and what you do, who may not have this particular gift.

12, “For”: How does the Church's Work get Done?

In our version, the next verse appears to begin with three parallel prepositions.

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

It looks as though there are three roles for the gifted men: perfect the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body of Christ. But in this case the AV has used one English word (“for”) to represent two different Greek words. We might more accurately translate,

For the perfecting of the saints, unto ministry work, unto edifying the body of Christ.

The difference is subtle but important. The gifted men are responsible to perfect the saints, **so that the saints** can do ministry work and edify the body of Christ. If you felt that the distinctive role given to the evangelists and pastor-teachers left you with too little to do, this insight may make you feel overburdened. The work of the Spirit cascades through the distinguished gifts, through the saints, to achieve the goals outlined below.

Let's consider each of these three tasks.

The Perfecting of the Saints

The noun *καταρτισμος* appears only here in the Greek Bible. But the verb from which it is derived (Strong's 4050) is more common. It means “to prepare something for a purpose,” whether

- by creating it in the first place (Rom 9:22 “vessels of wrath, **fitted** for destruction”),
- or by training (Luke 6:40, “the disciple is not above his master, but every one that is **perfect** shall be as his master”),
- or by repairing some damage (Matt 4:21, James and John were “**mending** their nets”).

What is that purpose for which the saints are to be prepared? In fact, there are two.

Ministry Work

The basic idea of “ministry” is service to others, and perhaps “service” would be a better translation.

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The term has a very broad range in the NT, illustrated nicely in Acts 6. In v. 4, the apostles feel the need to reserve their strength and time for “the ministry of the word,” so they seek the appointment of seven men to relieve them of the need to “serve tables” (v. 2), where “serve” is the verb from which “ministry” is derived.

There is no reason to restrict the word to any part of this range in our text. If I am successful as a pastor-teacher, each of you should be equipped for some form of service to the body of Christ. That service may range from formal teaching to personal encouragement to helps. Everyone has some gift, and my responsibility is to help prepare you to exercise that gift for the benefit of the body.

The inclusion of teaching among ministry-work is important. The distinctive role of the pastor-teacher is not to teach; it is to prepare saints for ministry, including teaching. This is where the next generation of pastor-teachers should come from—not from seminary, but from within the church. We have clear examples of this in the NT:

Paul told Timothy (2 Tim 2:2),

the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

And to the Colossians (1:27, 28), he wrote,

Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach, **warning** every man, and **teaching** every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

only to exhort them later (3:16), using two of the same verbs (highlighted),

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; **teaching** and **admonishing** [**warning**] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

One can imagine a church in which the pastor-teacher never ministers publicly, and instead devoted himself to working with those men who show gift in teaching, to equip them for this work.

In fact, when WIBC set out on our pilgrimage three decades ago, we thought this would be how things would work. In 1982, when we had been in Ann Arbor for less than three years and the church had been meeting together after the NT pattern for less than two, my job at the university ended. I had a job offer from Mitre Corporation in Massachusetts. At that time, Dave exhorted me that my work here was not finished. He understood that for the church to function biblically, we needed to develop teachers from within, not import them from a Bible school or seminary. He recognized that other men hadn't yet been developed to the point that they could take over the public ministry, and he encouraged me to stay in the area to work to that end.

This objective—to prepare others for ministry work—is why our studies tend to the technical side. I want you to know, not only what the Bible says, but how you can know that is what it says. You cannot teach responsibly unless you can say with confidence before the Lord, “The Bible says X, and it does not say Y.” Consider how fearfully the prophets rail against the false prophets,

Jer 29:23, they have spoken lying words in my name, which I have not commanded them;

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Ezek 13:7 have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken?

Ezek 13:2-3 Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel that prophesy, and say thou unto them that prophesy out of their own hearts, Hear ye the word of the LORD; 3 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!

Teaching is not sharing what you think God said. The teacher must be sure that what he speaks is indeed the Word of God. Thus James exhorts us (3:1), “My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”

To discern the meaning of Scripture, you need the Spirit's guidance—but you also need to be able to read and understand the Bible as a linguistic document. This task does not require special schooling or esoteric knowledge—but it does require hard work. Paul commends those elders who “labor in the word and doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17), who work hard both in extracting truth from Scripture and also in presenting it.¹ All of us should encourage one another frequently with short devotional thoughts derived from our daily devotions, but those who teach publicly must know how to analyze the Bible objectively, so that they can be sure that what they are presenting is indeed the mind of the Lord, and so that they can defend the church against false teaching. We will see more evidence of this later in this text, when Paul tells us that the goal of this whole process is bringing saints to “the unity of the faith” (v. 13) and avoiding doctrinal error (v. 14).

The greatest compliment anyone ever paid me for my teaching was Ryan Nelson's note in his wedding program, introducing those who participated in his ceremony, where he said that I had not only taught him the Scriptures, but taught him how to study the Scriptures. That has been my objective. But this job is still not finished. Those who have “caught the bug” have not, by and large, remained in our fellowship. I am teaching more now than I was thirty years ago, not less. Of all the changes that we might consider together, it seems to me that the most important might be for us to agree that others need to be prepared to do this aspect of ministry work, and to consider how to use some of our time for that preparation.

Edifying the Body of Christ

The third phrase captures the object of your service, the service that I am to prepare you to render. It is to build up the body of Christ, the church.

When we studied Ephesians eight years ago, we saw that edification is always corporate. It has to do, not with the spiritual growth of an individual, but with our life together. The phrase 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. The verb means “to build,” and 31/57 uses in the NT are literal. The metaphor is based on Matt 16:18, “I will build my church.”

¹ “Word” has no article in the Greek, and virtually all modern translations take it to mean “speaking,” thus synonymous with “doctrine.” But see Gill for evidence that “labor in word” is a common Jewish notion referring to the study of the Scripture. For other anarthrous instances of *λογος* in the sense of “scripture,” see 2 Cor 6:7; 1 Thes 2:13; 4:15; Heb 5:13; James 1:18, 22, 23 (but it is curious that most of these have genitives).

- “Body” is a biological metaphor.

The blending of the two is powerful. As the body of Christ, we continue his ministry outward, to a lost world. As the temple of the Lord, we offer worship to our God. The church does both, and Paul provides us with a picture of each of these functions.

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. Our concern in this series of studies is with our meetings together, so it is important to note the emphasis that Paul places here on the life of the body. We will see more details of this in vv. 13-16.

- Evangelism is part of this building (Rom 15:20), as new stones are added to the church, new organs to the body.
- So is teaching, as we learn how to live together in love. (Compare 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.)
- So are works of practical ministry, as we draw one another more tightly into the group.

The job of knitting individuals together into a body is not one that I can do. It is one that you need to do. And if I am sobered by our lack of progress in preparing men for the teaching aspect of ministry work, I am greatly encouraged by the joint commitment of you all in more practical service to one another, giving tangible expression to the love of Christ that binds us together.

The Christian life is not something we can live in isolation. We are part of a body, and we need to be tightly knit together with others in that body. This is not an argument for more church meetings. In fact, meetings are dangerous if they lead us to think that our corporate responsibility to each other begins and ends at the church door. The manifestation of our life as a body should permeate everything we do, every day of the week. The meetings that we do have should enable us to function more effectively in all of our interactions with one another. And all of us need to be involved in building up that body.

13, “Till”: What is the Goal of that Work?

This process of pastor-teachers preparing the saints so that the saints can do ministry work and edify the body has three clear goals. This verse summarizes them. Then vv. 14-16 expound on them at greater length.

13 Till we all come—The verb is used metaphorically. Literally, it means “to arrive at a place.” Here he describes the destination toward which the church is moving.

in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

If the AV erred by translating different Greek prepositions with the same English one in v. 12, here it errs by translating the same Greek preposition with different English ones. There are three parallel goals to our journey. We all seek to arrive together

**unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
unto a perfect man,**

unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Let's consider them in turn.

Unity of the Faith and the Knowledge of the Son of God

“Unity” here is repeated from v.3, and these are its only two instances in the entire Greek Bible. There, the unity was “of the Spirit.” We were presumed to have it already, and exhorted to preserve it. Here we are presented with a unity toward which we need to grow. There are two aspects to this unity.

Unity of the Faith

“Faith” can be understood in two senses.

- Subjectively, it is our response to the Lord, our attitude of submission to him and trust in his promises.
- Objectively, it is the body of truth that we embrace.

Here, we should understand it in the second sense, for two reasons.

1. The only way we get the unity of the Spirit that Paul says his readers already have is by way of the subjective faith. They have already believed. Unity of faith in this sense is accomplished, not something in the future.
2. The presence of the article, “the faith,” suggests something outside of ourselves. Compare Jude 3, “contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”

Many churches insist on agreement to a doctrinal statement before receiving people into membership. Paul teaches that doctrinal agreement is the result of life together in the church, not a precondition. (But before joining with a church with which one has doctrinal differences, one should determine that their processes are open to exploring those differences and growing into unity.)

The goal of doctrinal unity is a strong argument for the importance of objective expository teaching in the church, and for Paul's singling out four gifts that deal primarily with teaching. Jude's comment that we must be prepared to “contend for the faith” indicates the need to know the Scriptures well enough that we can rebut erroneous interpretations. Solid Bible exposition is not all that we need—but it is an important component of the life of a healthy church.

Unity of the Knowledge of the Son of God

“Knowledge” *ἐπιγνωσις* appears elsewhere in Eph only in 1:17, where he prays

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

Note the parallel with the present verse. There, knowledge of Christ is paired with “wisdom and revelation”; here, it is paired with “the faith,” the body of truth contained in that revelation. Revelation (1:17), correct faith (4:13), is important, but by itself it is sterile. It must be accompanied with “the knowledge of the Son of God.” What is that knowledge?

I've reviewed every text I can find in the Bible that describes this knowledge.² Three characteristics stand out to me.

Person, not Facts

Knowing a person is not the same as knowing something about a person. The Bible often speaks of knowing that the Lord is God, or knowing that he has done some particular thing. This is not the same as knowing a person.

- I know that Putin is the prime minister of Russia, but I do not know Putin.
- An unbeliever may know that Jesus lived in the first century, but is far from knowing Jesus.

To know a person is to be their friend, to be intimate with them. The strongest sense of the term, indeed, is to describe the intimacy of marriage. The Lord Jesus calls us his friends (John 15:14). Eternal life consists in knowing him and the Father:

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that **they might know** thee the only true God, and **Jesus Christ**, whom thou hast sent.

The first goal of the ministry that cascades from the Spirit of God through the gifted men down to the saints is unity in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

The Son, not the Father

John 17:3 speaks of knowing both God and Jesus. The two are closely related, but still distinguished. Our Lord's teaching makes this clear. In addition to John 17:3,

Matt 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man **knoweth the Son**, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. (compare Luke 10:22)

John 14:7 If **ye had known me**, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

John 16:3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not **known** the Father, nor **me**.

So Peter says,

2 Pet 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the **knowledge** of God, and **of Jesus our Lord**,

The next characteristic of knowing Jesus makes this distinction clear.

Ongoing, not Accomplished

When the NT speaks of knowing God, it views it as something that can be accomplished once for all.³

² See the Notes for a catalog.

³ Col 1:10 shows that knowing God can also be viewed as a process. The point here is that it, unlike knowing the Lord Jesus, can be described as accomplished at the time of salvation.

John 14:7 from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Gal 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God,

To know God is to be saved. It is to have the wall of separation broken down, and to be admitted into his family.

The NT never describes our knowledge of the Lord Jesus as accomplished. On the contrary, we are repeatedly reminded that knowing him is a process over time. We see this in our current verse (where this knowledge is a goal toward which they are to grow). Perhaps the strongest statement of it is Phil 3:8-11, written about this same time.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of **the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 **That I may know him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

For Paul, knowing Christ means becoming like him, learning by experience what his passion was about. And this is consistent with our experience in other interpersonal relations. After decades of marriage, a husband and wife continue to grow in their knowledge of each other.

Thus the first goal of the ministry in the church is that all together would become one in the faith they confess and their personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus. Notice again the balance between head and heart. Neither is adequate without the other.

A Perfect Man

“Perfect” τελειος means “complete,” and is often used in a chronological sense, “mature.” The simplest reading is in contrast to “babes” in v. 14, and in support of this, one might compare the similar phrase in Col 1:28,

Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

But it differs in two important characteristics, which suggest we should seek another meaning.

1. In Col, Paul speaks of the perfecting of individuals (“every man”), while Eph 4:13 envisions a single perfect man. He does not speak of our arriving at “perfect men,” but “a perfect man.”
2. “Man” in Col is ανθρωπος, the generic term for “person,” but in Eph it is ανηρ, which specifically means an adult male.

The combination ανηρ τελειος appears elsewhere in the Greek Bible in only two other places, Jas 3:2 and 2 Sam 22:26. Its rarity suggests that we should see both NT uses as echoes of the 2 Sam use. There, it appears in the Psalm that summarizes David's life (largely duplicated as Ps 18, though with a different LXX rendering of the corresponding verse), and in a context that speaks of the conditions under which someone can expect God's favor.

2 Sam 22:21-27 The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 23 For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. 24 I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. 25 Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. 26 With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with **the upright man** thou wilt shew thyself upright. 27 With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury.

In this context, τέλειος means not so much mature as complete, sound, having everything in its place.

Paul has described the work of the saints as “building up [a] body.” Viewed as a body, the church must become complete, sound, pleasing to God.

Of course, it's not just any body that we are building up. It is “the body of Christ.” For Paul, and perhaps for David as well, the “perfect man” who deserves God's favor can be no one else than the Messiah, and this expression thus anticipates the third object of our growth:

The Measure of the Stature of the Fulness of Christ

Let's unpack this phrase from the inside out. There is something called “the fulness of Christ,” which has a size (stature) that can be measured.

The fulness of Christ--This phrase reminds us of 1:23, which calls the church “his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” When we studied that text eight years ago, we saw that the notion there is that the church fills up Christ. He is the head, but we are the body, and Paul can say (Col 1:24) that he “fills up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ.” Compare Annie Flint's hymn:

Christ has no hands but our hands To do His work today,
He has no feet but our feet To lead men in His way;
He has no tongues but our tongues To tell men how He died,
He has no help but our help To bring men to His side.

We are the only Bible The careless world will read,
We are the sinner's gospel, We are the scoffers' creed;
We are the Lord's last message Given in deed and word,
What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?

What if our hands are busy With other things than His?
What if our feet are walking Where sin's allurements is?
What if our tongues are speaking Of things His life would spurn?
How can we hope to help Him And welcome His return?

Stature of the fulness of Christ--We are filling up the Christ by building up his body. The effect of our work will be the stature, the size, of that fulness, that body.

Measure of the stature ...--When you think of something as having a stature, a size, it is natural to want to measure it. On the door frame by Anita's study are a series of marks showing how tall Gene was over the period that he lived in our home. We just wrote on the frame, but you can buy a printed

ruler to tape onto the wall and measure your children. What would we find if we were to measure the growth of the body of Christ?

Paul presents the measure here as a goal: we are to attain “unto the measure.” In this context, the word probably has the sense of “full measure.” The ruler on the wall has an upper limit, a stature associated with full maturity, and our joint ministry in the church is to continue until the body reaches that full measure.

14-16, “That”: A More Detailed Look at the Goals

This section amplifies v. 13, treating the same objectives but with more discussion as to their importance. It presents a contrast. First Paul outlines a bad outcome that the process of the previous verses will help us avoid. Then he describes a good outcome that will result if this process is followed. In between the two is a synopsis of the process itself.

14, A Danger to Avoid

The danger is the prevalence of false teaching, which again motivates the need for authoritative objective teaching by the gifted men as the basis for equipping the saints. The focus here is on the first of the three functions of v. 12.

14 That we henceforth be no more children,--This phrase makes two contrasts with the destination described in v. 13.

- We begin as children, literally “infants.” Our goal is to attain to full stature.
- We begin as many (“children,” not “child”). Our goal is to become one perfect man, the body of Christ.

tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine,--A characteristic of children is that they have no critical faculty. The Scriptures describe them thus:

Deut 1:39 your children, which in that day had **no knowledge between good and evil**,

Isa 7:16 For **before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good**, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of **full age**, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to **discern both good and evil**.

Paul here compares them to a small boat on a stormy sea. Every new teaching that comes along captures their attention. What they believed yesterday, they consider to be heresy today. At this stage of (im)maturity, believers do not manifest “the unity of the faith.”

It is not wrong to consider new ideas when they are presented. But a characteristic of youth is the tendency to commit too quickly to those ideas, without sufficiently evaluating them.

Heb 13:9 Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of

the sea driven with the wind and tossed. ... 8 A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways.

Luke commends the Bereans (Acts 17:11) because

they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

They were open to hear new ideas, but careful to test them by the truth they had already recognized.

This youthful curiosity is natural. Unfortunately, it is exploited by those with carnal motives. The “winds of doctrine” result, not from random deviations around the central core of truth, but from deliberate nefarious intent. Paul makes this hostile environment clear in the rest of the verse:

by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;--Much teaching that takes place in the name of Christ is motivated, not by a desire to build up the body, but deceptively. Paul highlights three characteristics of this behavior:

- **sleight:** Trickery, literally “dice-playing,” referring to various ways of cheating. False teaching “plays games” with the text. But cheating presumes that there is a correct way to play. You can't catch someone cheating if you don't know the rules; you can't detect the cheating of false teaching if you don't know the proper way to interpret the Scriptures.
- **craftiness:** Cunning, reflecting sophistication and expertise in their approach. They are sophisticated, and can make their arguments look very persuasive. It's not obvious how to detect or counter them. A casual review may not reveal the error.
- **deceive:** Their motives are not transparent. Often, they are driven by a desire to enrich themselves or enhance their own prestige.

The danger of false teaching is one of the main reasons that the church needs solid expository teaching. Error is not simply the result of carelessness or inexperience. It is being perpetrated deliberately (“deceive”), by people who are extremely smart (“cunning”) and know how to fool you (“sleight”). The best defense is a solid understanding of what the Scriptures really teach.

15a, The Process

15 But speaking the truth in love,--This clause joins together the warning of v. 14 with the promise of 15-16. It echoes the two-fold unity that v.13 told us to pursue.

- “speaking the truth” reflects the unity of the faith. The verb means “be truthful.” It is not restricted to speaking, but refers to truthfulness in every aspect of conduct, in contrast to the deception described in the previous verse. Thus it embraces every aspect of “ministry work” from v. 12. Robinson's “maintain the truth” captures the idea. In its only other use in the NT use (Gal 4:16), it focuses on truthful speech, which also fits with the main clause of this paragraph, the risen Lord's gift to the church in v. 11.
- Like the second unity in v. 13, “in love” reminds us that there are right and wrong ways to maintain the truth. The truth is not a hammer that we are to use to beat one another. Every aspect of ministry is to be conducted in love.

15b-16, The Vision to Anticipate

may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:--Here is a restatement of the second and third goals from v. 13, the result of the third process in v. 12, the building up of the body of Christ. To “grow up into” *ωξάνω εις* something means to become that thing as the result of an ongoing process:

- Gen 30:30, Laban's livestock became a multitude as a result of Jacob's husbandry (and the Lord's blessing)
- Eph 2:21, the building becomes a holy temple as believers are built into it by the Spirit.

Thus the point here is that the believers grow up together to become the body of Christ.

Christ is not only the body, but also the head of the body. The shift in metaphor is sudden, from Christ as the model of the whole to his specific role within the church.

16 From whom the whole body ... maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.-- Note the recursive nature of this process. The body makes increase of the body. Every part is involved.

fitly joined together—The verb appears only here and at 2:21 in the entire Greek Bible. It comes from the vocabulary of the stonemason (see Robinson's detached note), and (like the “edify” vocabulary) reminds us of the metaphor of the building in ch. 2 (“In whom all the building **fitly framed together** groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord,” 2:21). The stonemason chooses a stone of the right approximate shape, chisels it to rough dimensions, then rubs it to smooth it until all the high spots are lowered, then drills holes for brass dowels that connect it with neighboring stones. The construction of the body of Christ, the temple of the Lord, requires no less care and diversity of exercise.

and compacted—Etymologically, the word means “connect together.” Paul uses the word twice in the partner epistle of Colossians:

2:1-3 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; 2 That their hearts might be comforted, **being knit together** in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; 3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, **and knit together**, increaseth with the increase of God.

But these passages don't really give us any more detail on the meaning of the term. Commentators speculate that it is a medical term, though we have no evidence for this.

The word is used ten times in the LXX in the sense “to teach, instruct,” probably based on the notion of connecting the teacher and student through a common understanding, or else connecting ideas and arguments together. E.g.,

Exo 4:12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and **teach thee** what thou shalt say.

Eph 4:11-16

Exo 18:16 When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and **I do make them know** the statutes of God, and his laws.

Isaiah 40:13 Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath **taught** him? (quoted in 1 Cor 2:16)

This sense is also seen twice in Acts,

Acts 9:22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, **proving** that this is very Christ. (note the sense of proof, of detailed argument)

Acts 16:10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, **assuredly gathering** that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. (Again, the word suggests putting the pieces of evidence together.

With this overwhelming and uniform biblical usage, and keeping in mind the main clause of this paragraph (he gave gifted men), we should certainly understand the word in this sense here as well. The whole body is “fitly joined together and carefully taught”. The “joining together” of the body is driven by and originates from the teaching by which the members are equipped, and in which they then participate.

by that which every joint supplieth,--Every part of the body participates in this process. Compare again Col 1:27, 28

Christ in you, the hope of glory: 28 Whom we preach, **warning** every man, and **teaching** every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

with 3:16, using two of the same verbs (highlighted),

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; **teaching** and **admonishing [warning]** one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

according to the effectual working—The Greek word appears frequently in the Bible, and always refers to the operation “of transcendent beings” (BDAG), either God, or demons imitating his power. It always conveys the sense of the miraculous. The point here is that the joints do not originate the supply that they provide, but merely mediate it from the head. This relationship takes us back to the “from whom” with which the verse began. The parallel in Col 2:19 makes this a little clearer:

the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

We are thus reminded that the equipping that passes from the gifted men of v. 11 to the church, does not start with them. It begins with the Lord as the head.

in the measure of every part,--Each member of the body has his or her own part to play. In 4:7, he described the gifts of the Spirit in this way:

But unto every one of us is given grace **according to the measure** of the gift of Christ.

Compare Rom 12:3,

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of

himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man **the measure of faith**.

The part that each of us plays in the body is assigned by God. This is why one member is not to boast against another (1 Cor 12). Even Paul recognizes that his role is circumscribed:

2 Cor 10:13 But we will not boast of things **without our measure**, but **according to the measure** of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a **measure** to reach even unto you.

Thus the divine working flows from the head, through the distinctive gifts of v. 11, to prepare every member of the body to carry out the roles for which God has gifted them. As they exercise those roles, the church is built up, according to two metaphors. It is a living body to minister to the needs of a lost world, and a holy temple to promote the worship of our great God.

Notes

v.13, Knowledge of the Son of God

OT Background

Isa 53:11? See John Murray for extensive comment, vol 1, appendix c.

Know the Lord

Exodus 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who *is* the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? **I know not the LORD**, neither will I let Israel go.

1 Samuel 3:7 7 Now **Samuel did not yet know the LORD**, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.

Isaiah 19:19-22 19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. 20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. 21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and **the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day**, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform *it*. 22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal *it*: and they shall return *even* to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them.

Jeremiah 31:34 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: **for they shall all know me**, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hosea 2:18-20 18 And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and *with* the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely. 19 And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in

lovingkindness, and in mercies. 20 I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and **thou shalt know the LORD**.

Hosea 6:3 3 Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to **know the LORD**: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth.

Jeremiah 9:24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and **knoweth me**, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD.

Know that I am the Lord

Ex 6:7 (cf. v.3); 7:5, 17; cf. 8:10; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 29:46; 31:13; 83x in all, in Exod (10x), Deut (1x), Kings, (2x) Isa (4x), Ezek, (63x) and Joel (1x). This phrase is often used in an adversarial sense. The purpose of the plagues was that the Egyptians would know that he is YHWH, but there is no indication that they ever knew the Lord—that remains an eschatological hope (Isa 19:21).

Know that the Lord xxx

Exodus 16:6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt:

Numbers 16:28 And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for *I have not done them* of mine own mind.

Deuteronomy 4:35 Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he *is* God; *there is* none else beside him.

Deuteronomy 7:9 Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he *is* God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations;

Judges 16:20 And she said, The Philistines *be* upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him.

1 Samuel 18:28 And Saul saw and knew that the LORD *was* with David, and *that* Michal Saul's daughter loved him.

2 Chronicles 13:5 Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, *even* to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

Psalms 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he *is* God: *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Isa 49:26 all flesh shall know that I the LORD *am* thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob.

Four times in Zech, this phrase captures the messianic paradox of the Lord saying that the Lord has sent him:

- Zech 2:9 For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their

servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me.

- Zech 2:11 And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee.
- Zech 4:9 The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you.
- Zech 6:15 And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God.

NT References

Gospels

Matt 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

Luke 10:22 All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and *he* to whom the Son will reveal *him*.

John 14:7 If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

John 16:3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

Epistles

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the **knowledge** of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Gal 4:8-9 8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. 9 But now, after that **ye have known God, or rather are known of God**, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Eph 1:17-19 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in **the knowledge of him**: 18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,--This is just like 4:13. The “wisdom and revelation” correspond to “unity of the faith,” and embrace the factual content in 18-19, but “the knowledge of him” gives the context in which this knowledge is to be enjoyed.

Eph 4:13 13 Till we all come unto the unity ... of **the knowledge of the Son of God**,--Robinson notes the importance of the shift from “Christ” to “Son of God,” an expression used only here in Eph. (Christ

appears 45x) (Compare Gal 2:20, the only instance of “son of God” in the book, compared with 39 of Christ) Focuses our notion on his redemptive work for us.

Phil 3:8-11 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of **the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord**: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 **That I may know him**, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Col 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in **the knowledge of God**;

2 Pet 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the **knowledge of God**, and of Jesus our Lord,

2 Pet 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the **knowledge of him** that hath called us to glory and virtue:

2 Pet 1:8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren nor unfruitful in the **knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ**.

2 Pet 2:20 For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the **knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**,

2 Pet 3:18 But grow in grace, and *in* the **knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**.

1 John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we **know him**, if we keep his commandments.

1 John 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, **that we may know him that is true**, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

Syntax of 4:12

Commentators differ on the relation among the prepositional phrases of v. 12. Calvin, Hodge, Ellicott, and Alford maintain that all three phrases describe the work of the gifted men. The analysis by Hodge and Ellicott of the alternatives is the most detailed, and almost identical. Both give the same reason for rejecting the subordination of εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν κτλ. Το πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν κτλ. : that διακονία, especially in a context dealing with offices in the church, refers to “spiritual services of an official nature” (Ellicott), rather than more general Christian service.

Two observations give me pause.

First, they consider the main theme of the passage to be official ministry. But Paul does not use the more common terms “elder” and “overseer” that everywhere else he uses to describe the office in the church. His focus here seems rather to interpret the reference in Ps 68 to the gifts that the risen Lord has bestowed on his church. The text is at least as much about spiritual gifts as it is about church structure, and should be studied with Rom 9 and 1 Cor 12 in view at least as much as Tit 1 and 1 Tim 3. In that context, διακονία is in fact used as a very general term for Christian service:

Eph 4:11-16

1 Cor 12:4-6 Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are differences of administrations διακονιων, but the same Lord. 6 And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

Here, in parallel with “gifts” and “operations,” διακονια refers to any service that one believer can render to another.

Second, if we do agree with their assertion that διακονια should be restricted to “spiritual services of an official nature,” then the focus would be most naturally on the diaconate, not on the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. If we’re talking about offices rather than functions, διακονια is what a διακονος does.

So I don’t find their argument compelling. As they note, others differ with their view. Ellicott admits, “It is extremely difficult to fix the exact shade of meaning which these prepp. are intended to convey.” In particular, H.C.G. Moule and J.A. Robinson both support the structure that I propose. Moule offers no discussion of any alternatives; Robinson notes the shift from articular to anarthrous phrases. The usage of 4:14 would be consistent with this, but in general there are many counterexamples. It seems to me that there are better reasons.

1. Though καταρτισμος appears only here in the NT, the verb καταρτιζω is fairly common. Different verbs tend to be govern their objects through distinctive prepositions. Καταρτιζω regularly designates the purpose for which something is being fitted through *eis* : Rom 9:22, Heb 11:3; 13:21. This usage would encourage a Greek speaker to associate the εις phrases with the verbal noun καταρτισμος rather than with the more remote εδωκεν in v. 11.
2. The context emphasizes, not a hierarchical dependence of the congregation on the elders, but the role that all the believers have in ministering to one another. Verse 16 summarizes the discussion by saying that “the whole body ... maketh increase of the body” and speaks the body “edifying itself.” This doctrine has indeed been abused by those who would cast off the authority of the elders, but under that authority, the health of the church depends vitally on the ministry of all the members to one another, as 1 Cor 12 makes clear.
3. The book of Colossians, written about this same time, offers a striking example of the process outlined in my reading of v. 12. In Col 1:28, Paul emphasizes his personal ministry of preaching Christ, “warning νουθετεω every man and teaching διδασκω every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ.” Clearly he is thinking of his distinctive work as an apostle. Yet in 3:16, he exhorts them, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching διδασκω and admonishing νουθετεω one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” As a result of his authoritative ministry toward them, they are enabled to minister to one another. He presents himself as an example of how an apostle equips the saints so that they can minister to one another.

Προς ... εις is common in the LXX for movement to a person, refined as a place. But Eph 4:12 appears to be the only place where the first noun describes an action.

Robinson holds that the omission of the article in the 2nd and 3rd prepositional phrases in 4:12 shows that they are subordinate to the first. This would be analogous to Hollenbach's constraints. But usage doesn't bear this out.

Eph 4:11-16

Here is a rough collection from Paul:

Multiple anarthrous

Rom 1:3, same referent

Rom 1:4, same

Rom 1:17

Multiple arthrous

Rom 1:9, same referent

Mixed

From arthrous to anarthrous

Apparently the same

Rom 1:24, adverbial, seem to have same referent

Rom 5:5, adverbial, same referent (but 2nd as PN?)

Rom 10:1 adjectival, same

Rom 16:20 adverbial same

1 Cor 2:7 adverbial; 15:19 adverbial (PN)

2 Cor 4:6 adverbial ; 10:15;

Gal 1:14

Col 1:11 (but *pas* may function as definitizer)

1 Thes 2:14 (PN)

2 Thes 2:14

Heb 9:19 (PN)

Possibly different

Rom 1:2; adverbial, “in holy scriptures” could modify “prophets”

Rom 2:16, adverbial, note NET rendering!

Rom 15:13 adverbial, same

Gal 3:26

Eph 4:14 (note shift back to arthrous)

Phil 4:19

2 Thes 1:7

Heb 6:11

Bottom line: doesn't follow Hollenbach reliably.

4:13 “measure of (the stature of the fulness) of Christ”

It is possible to understand “fulness” as modifying “stature,” as parenthesized in the heading, that is, “the full stature of Christ.” Other examples of this construction (which is based on Hebrew usage) include

2 Cor 4:4 “the light of the **gospel of the glory** of Christ” = “the glorious gospel”

Col 1:13 “the **son of the love** of him” = “his beloved son”

Col 2:18 “the **mind of the flesh** of him” = “his fleshly mind”

2 Thes 1:9 “the **glory of the power** of him” = “his powerful glory”

But given the previous use of “the fulness of Christ” in 1:23, I prefer the interpretation given above.