

LEAD! A.11 Christ's Body

In Which We Become the Church, As We Grow Into Christ Our Head Via His Gifts

Continuing the theme of [Sanctification](#), we explore how we are [disciplined](#) into the [name](#) of [Christ](#) through His body -- the [Father's](#) principle vehicle for forming His [Kingdom](#), by His [Spirit](#). Specifically, we see how the fact that we serve [One God](#) requires us to worship Him as One Church.

*[Note: I am now using the **New King James Version** for my interlinear; hopefully this will increase the readability.]*

Adoration

[Psalm 122](#)

Bible

[Ephesians 4:1-16](#)

In Paul's [Epistle](#) to the church at [Ephesus](#), he has been talking about the glorious work of the Father in calling us to His purpose. He now asks us to live up to that calling:

I, therefore, the [prisoner](#) of the [Lord](#), [beseech](#) you to [walk worthy](#) of the [calling](#) with which you were [called](#),

So what does such a walk require?

with all [lowliness](#) and [gentleness](#), with [longsuffering](#), [bearing](#) with one another in [love](#),

Fascinating; the key skills required for walking with Christ apparently aren't intelligence, courage, or religiosity -- but a willingness to suffer. [1] To what end?

[endeavoring](#) to keep the [unity](#) of the [Spirit](#) in the [bond](#) of [peace](#).

Unity is **hard**. Paul knows that it requires immense humility, self-control and patience to maintain a healthy community with (other) fallen human beings -- but it is essential. Why?

There is [one body](#) and one Spirit, just as you were called in one [hope](#) of your calling;

one Lord, one [faith](#), one [baptism](#);

one [God](#) and [Father](#) of [all](#), who is [above](#) all, and [through](#) all, and [in](#) you all.

For Paul, the unity of the church isn't so much an ideal as a "brute fact", grounded in

the reality that God Himself is One.

In a polytheistic world, it made sense to have many different temples and worshipping communities centered around different deities. But we serve a single God, who has no division or conflict within Himself, who is so completely sovereign that He leaves room for no other gods.

He has given us only One Son, into whose name we must be baptized. We all share the same faith in who He is, and have the same hope for eternal life.

In short, in all the most essential things that define who we truly are, everyone who worships Jesus as Lord truly is part of one body -- whether we like it or not! [2]

Of course, the fact that we are *united* does not mean we are treated *uniformly*; for Christ gives each of us our own [grace](#). Not in proportion to what we deserve, but in accordance with His generous nature:

But to each one of us [grace](#) was [given](#) according to the [measure](#) of Christ's [gift](#).

Paul ties Christ's giving into His ascension, via [Psalm 68:18](#):

Therefore He says: "When He [ascended](#) on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

This mirrors our [earlier lesson](#) on [John 16](#), where Christ says He must die and ascend to heaven in order to "gift" us the Holy Spirit:

(Now this, "He ascended"--what does it mean but that He also first [descended](#) into the lower parts of the [earth](#)?

He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the [heavens](#), that He might [fill](#) all things.)

So what gifts does He give us to help fulfill His mission of "filling all things"?

And He Himself gave some [to be] [apostles](#), some [prophets](#), some [evangelists](#), and some [pastors](#) and [teachers](#),

These roles are sometimes referred to as "[church offices](#)" or the "[five-fold ministry gifts](#)"; frequently the "elders" (from [Titus](#)) and "deacons" (from [Timothy](#)) are also included.

The nature and relevance of these roles is the subject of much [ecclesiological](#) debate between various Christian traditions. "Cessationists" claim that the first two are no longer needed or active, while charismatics argue that all five are essential. There is also disagreement about whether "pastor and teacher" is one office or two, and whether some offices are superior to others.

One reason for the confusion is that relatively general Greek words are used to indicate very specific Christian concepts -- but the New Testament writers never produced a [glossary](#) defining exactly what they meant! Thus, we need infer a definition from the

way they used those terms, and different groups choose different interpretations.

The most important thing to realize is that these were given to us by **Christ**, for our benefit and His glory. As such, our primary task is to understand what **His** purpose is in giving these gifts, to ensure we are accomplishing **that** (regardless of what terminology or mechanisms we use).

To that end, here is one possible breakdown of these roles:

Role	Literally	Function
Apostle	"one sent forth"	Lays the foundation for the church
Prophet	"one who brings forth hidden things"	Speaks God's truth to the church
Evangelist	"bringer of good tidings"	Preaches the gospel to save sinners
Pastor	"shepherd"	Watches over God's people
Teacher	"impartor of instruction"	Instills doctrine in Christ's followers

As general concepts, these are relatively non-controversial -- but clearly necessary. Disagreements arise over the level of supernatural anointing and spiritual authority associated with each of these roles, and whether/how that may have changed over the course of church history. [3]

Perhaps the best way to resolve those questions is to focus on **why** He gave these gifts:

for the [equipping](#) of the [saints](#) for the [work](#) of [ministry](#)

for the [edifying](#) of the body of Christ,

This verse contains two revolutionary ideas:

1. The first is that church offices -- i.e., leaders -- do **not** exist to "do" ministry! Rather, their role is to equip ("complete") all of us (those being sanctified) for ministry. [4]
2. Second, the purpose of all this is not our individual perfection (much less happiness!), but that we as the **entire** body of Christ may be built up.

The main reason there is so much concern and controversy over these offices is the fear of them being used and abused for personal gain and glory -- as, tragically, has happened far too often in church history. If we truly understood (and lived out) Paul's teaching here, we would see that the ultimate measure of a leader's effectiveness is actually how well their **followers** manifest holiness, ministry, and maturity.

In short, the key is realizing that the "gifts" in question are **not** the specific anointings for, e.g., apostlehood or prophecy. Rather, this verse is actually [best read](#) as "Christ gave these people as gifts to His body". In other words, the apostle is not the *recipient* of a gift, they **are** the gift! Which means we as the body of Christ are the true recipients of all these gifts.

To what end?

till we [all](#) come to the unity of the faith and of the [knowledge](#) of the [Son](#) of God, to a [perfect](#) man, to the [measure](#) of the [stature](#) of the [fullness](#) of Christ;

The goal is that all of us *together* need to not just trust in Christ, but know Him and be filled with His "name".

For Paul, holiness is not a solitary ideal to be pursued in hermit-like isolation. Rather, it is something we achieve as a community, through the workings of the leaders God has gifted us with.

Why? Because alone, we are far too vulnerable [5]:

that we should no longer be [children](#), tossed to and fro and carried about with every [wind](#) of doctrine, by the [trickery](#) of men, in the [cunning craftiness](#) of [deceitful](#) plotting,

Whereas together, we can correct and complete each other [6]:

but, speaking the [truth](#) in love, may [grow up](#) in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--

Submitting to Christ as our head is utterly dependent upon our being joined together with His body. There is no room in Scripture for "[lone ranger](#)" Christians. Rather:

from whom the whole body, [joined](#) and [knit](#) together by what every [joint supplies](#), according to the effective [working](#) by which every [part](#) does its share, causes [growth](#) of the body for the [edifying](#) of itself in love.

Not only do we need the body, but the body needs us. It is only as each of us ministers to one other with the gifts God gave us -- as the gifts God made us! -- that He builds His kingdom in all of us.

Conversation

1. Which of the virtues in verse 2 do you find the most challenging to live out in community?
2. Have you ever been part of a church split? Could it have been avoided if everyone involved understood Paul's teaching from Ephesians 4?
3. Which (if any) of these functions have you helped perform (whether or not you held the "office")?
4. In your area of ministry, do you see leaders doing work or equipping others to do it? How might that be improved?
5. Have you ever been isolated as a Christian? What was the result?
6. Share about a time someone spoke the truth to you in love. How did you respond?

Decision

- Repentance: Which areas of your life are disconnected from the body of Christ?
- Action: Where can you be a gift to the body of Christ?
- Worship: What gifts can you thank God for today?

Explore More

- [Fivefold ministry – Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)
- [Apostle – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Evangelist – International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)
- [Body Of Christ](#)
- [What It Means to Speak the Truth in Love](#)

For Next Week

Read [Revelations 21](#). What kind of place is God preparing for us? Why?

References

[Bible Doctrine](#): Essential Teachings

- 26. The Nature of the Church
- 28. The Lord's Supper

[Essential Truths of the Christian Faith](#) (pdf)

- 75. The Apostles
- 76. The Church
- 77. The Marks of a True Church
- 86. The Fruit of the Spirit
- 87. Love
- 88. Hope

Blue Letter Bible. "Ephesians 4 - New King James Version." Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2008. 10 Nov 2008. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Eph&c=4&t=NKJV> >
