

**Ephesians 4:1-16**  
**December 11, 2022**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: What do you think the “unity of the Spirit” looks like in the church body? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** The main idea in today’s text is the unity of believers in Christ through the unity of the Spirit. This is the practical application of the doctrine taught in the first half of the letter: God is building a body, a temple, i.e., the church for which Christ is the Head. If we are going to preserve the “unity of Christ through the Spirit,” we need to exercise the Christian graces given to us, and there are seven listed in this text. Paul names these seven basic spiritual realities that unite all Christians. The oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality. The spiritual unity of a home, a marriage, a Bible study group, or a church is the responsibility of each person involved, and the job never ends. Our responsibility is to guard, protect, and preserve that unity. Let’s begin with the reading of this text.

**BOOK:**

**Unity in the Body of Christ**

**4** As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. <sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. <sup>8</sup> This is why it (or God) says:

“When he ascended on high,  
he led captives in his train  
and gave gifts to men.” (Ps 68:18)

<sup>9</sup> (What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions (or the depths of the earth)? <sup>10</sup> He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) <sup>11</sup> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

<sup>14</sup> Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. <sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

God is building a body, a temple. He has reconciled Jews and Gentiles to Himself in Christ. The oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality. Our responsibility is to guard, protect, and preserve that unity. To do this, we must understand four important facts.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 34-39)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*Ephesians 4:1–16*

All of Paul's letters contain a beautiful balance between doctrine and duty, and Ephesians is the perfect example. The first three chapters deal with doctrine, our riches in Christ, while the last three chapters explain duty, our responsibilities in Christ. The key word in this last half of the book is *walk* (Eph. 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15), while the key idea in the first half is wealth. In these last three chapters, Paul admonishes us to walk in *unity* (Eph. 4:1–16), *purity* (Eph. 4:17–5:17), *harmony* (Eph. 5:18–6:9), and *victory* (Eph. 6:10–24).

These four “walks” perfectly parallel the basic doctrines Paul has taught us in the first three chapters.

Before we look at this section in detail, we must note two important words in Ephesians 4:1—*therefore* and *beseech*. The word *therefore* indicates that Paul is basing his exhortations to duty on the doctrines taught in the first three chapters. (Rom. 12:1–2 are parallel verses.) The Christian life is not based on ignorance but knowledge, and the better we understand Bible doctrine, the easier it is to obey Bible duties. When people say, “Don't talk to me about doctrine—just let me live my Christian life!” they are revealing their ignorance of the way the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer. “It makes no difference what you believe, just as long as you live right” is a similar confession of ignorance. It *does* make a difference what you believe because what you believe determines how you behave!

**Our Wealth**

**Our Walk**

Called by grace to belong to His body (chap. 1)  
Walk worthy of your calling—the unity of the Body (4:1–16)

Raised from the dead (2:1–10)  
Put off the grave clothes (4:17–5:17); walk in the purity

Reconciled (2:11–22)  
Walk in harmony (5:18–6:9)

Christ's victory over Satan is the mystery (chap. 3)  
Walk in victory (6:10–24)

The word *beseech* indicates that God, in love, urges us to live for His glory. He does not say, as He did to the Old Testament Jews, “If you obey Me, I will bless you.” Rather, He says, “I have already blessed you—now, in response to My love and grace, obey Me.” He has given us such a marvelous calling in Christ; now it is our responsibility to live up to that calling.

The main idea in these first sixteen verses is the unity of believers in Christ. This is simply the practical application of the doctrine taught in the first half of the letter: God is building a body, a temple. He has reconciled Jews and Gentiles to Himself in Christ. The oneness of believers in Christ is already a spiritual reality. Our responsibility is to guard, protect, and preserve that unity. To do this, we must understand four important facts.

## The Grace of Unity (Eph. 4:1–3)

Unity is not uniformity. Unity comes from within and is a spiritual grace, while uniformity is the result of pressure from without. Paul used the human body as a picture of Christian unity (1 Cor. 12), and he adapts the same illustration here in this section (Eph. 4:13–16). Each part of the body is different from the other parts, yet all make up one body and work together.

If we are going to preserve the “unity of the Spirit,” we must possess the necessary Christian graces, and there are seven of them listed here. The first is *lowliness*, or *humility*. Someone has said, “Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it.” Humility means putting Christ first, others second, and self last. It means knowing ourselves, accepting ourselves, and being ourselves to the glory of God. God does not condemn you when you accept yourself and your gifts (Rom. 12:3). He just does not want us to think more *highly* of ourselves than we ought to—or *less highly* than we ought to.

*Meekness* is not weakness. It is power under control. Moses was a meek man (Num. 12:3), yet see the tremendous power he exercised. Jesus Christ was “meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29), yet He drove the money changers from the temple. In the Greek language, this word was used for a soothing medicine, a colt that had been broken, and a soft wind. In each case you have power, but that power is under control.

Allied with meekness is *long-suffering*, which literally means “long-tempered,” the ability to endure discomfort without fighting back. This leads to the mentioning of *forbearance*, a grace that cannot be experienced apart from love. “Love suffereth long and is kind” (1 Cor. 13:4). Actually, Paul is describing some of the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23); for the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3) is the result of the believer “walking in the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16).

The next grace that contributes to the unity of the Spirit is *endeavor*. Literally it reads “being eager to maintain, or guard, the unity of the Spirit.” “It’s great that you love each other,” I once heard a seasoned saint say to a newly wedded couple, “but if you’re going to be happy in marriage, you gotta work at it!” The verb used here is a present participle, which means we must constantly be endeavoring to maintain this unity. In fact, when we think the situation is the best, Satan will move in to wreck it. The spiritual unity of a home, a Sunday School class, or a church is the responsibility of each person involved, and the job never ends.

The final grace is *peace*—“the bond of peace.” Read James 3:13–4:10 for the most vivid treatment of war and peace in the New Testament. Note that the reason for war on the outside is war on the inside. If a believer cannot get along with God, he cannot get along with other believers. When “the peace of God” rules in our hearts, then we build unity (Col. 3:15).

## The Ground of Unity (Eph. 4:4–6)

Many people today attempt to unite Christians in a way that is not biblical. For example, they will say: “We are not interested in doctrines, but in love. Now, let’s forget our doctrines and just love one another!” But Paul did not discuss spiritual unity in the first three chapters; he waited until he had laid the doctrinal foundation. While not all Christians agree on some minor matters of Christian doctrine, they all do agree on the foundation truths of the faith. Unity built on anything other than Bible truth is standing on a very shaky foundation. Paul names here the seven basic spiritual realities that unite all true Christians.

**One body.** This is, of course, the body of Christ in which each believer is a member, placed there at conversion by the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 12:12–31). The one body is the model for the many local bodies that God has established across the world. The fact that a person is a member

of the one body does not excuse him from belonging to a local body, for it is there that he exercises his spiritual gifts and helps others to grow.

**One Spirit.** The same Holy Spirit indwells each believer, so that we belong to each other in the Lord. There are perhaps a dozen references to the Holy Spirit in Ephesians, because He is important to us in the living of the Christian life.

**One hope of your calling.** This refers to the return of the Lord to take His church to heaven. The Holy Spirit within is the assurance of this great promise (Eph. 1:13–14). Paul is suggesting here that the believer who realizes the existence of the one body, who walks in the Spirit, and who looks for the Lord’s return, is going to be a peacemaker and not a troublemaker.

**One Lord.** This is our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, lives for us, and one day will come for us. It is difficult to believe that two believers can claim to obey the same Lord, and yet not be able to walk together in unity. Someone asked Ghandi, the spiritual leader of India, “What is the greatest hindrance to Christianity in India?” He replied, “Christians.” Acknowledging the lordship of Christ is a giant step toward spiritual unity among His people.

**One faith.** There is one settled body of truth deposited by Christ in His church, and this is “the faith.” Jude calls it “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). The early Christians recognized a body of basic doctrine that they taught, guarded, and committed to others (2 Tim. 2:2). Christians may differ in some matters of interpretation and church practice; but all true Christians agree on “the faith”—and to depart from “the faith” is to bring about disunity within the body of Christ.

**One baptism.** Since Paul is here discussing the one body, this “one baptism” is probably the baptism of the Spirit, that act of the Spirit when He places the believing sinner into the body of Christ at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13). This is not an experience after conversion, nor is it an experience the believer should pray for or seek after. We are commanded to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), but we are never commanded to be baptized with the Spirit, for we have already been baptized by the Spirit at conversion. As far as the one body is concerned, there is one baptism—the baptism of the Spirit. But as far as local bodies of believers are concerned, there are two baptisms: the baptism of the Spirit, and water baptism.

**One God and Father.** Paul likes to emphasize God as Father (Eph. 1:3, 17; 2:18; 3:14; 5:20). The marvelous oneness of believers in the family of God is evident here, for God is over all, and working through all, and in all. We are children in the same family, loving and serving the same Father, so we ought to be able to walk together in unity. Just as in an earthly family, the various members have to give and take in order to keep a loving unity in the home, so God’s heavenly family must do the same. The “Lord’s Prayer” opens with “Our Father”—not “My Father.”

Paul is quite concerned that Christians not break the unity of the Spirit by agreeing with false doctrine (Rom. 16:17–20), and the Apostle John echoes this warning (2 John 6–11). The local church cannot believe in peace at any price, for God’s wisdom is “first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17). Purity of doctrine of itself does not produce spiritual unity, for there are churches that are sound in faith, but unsound when it comes to love. This is why Paul joins the two: “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

### **The Gifts for Unity (Eph. 4:7–11)**

Paul moves now from what all Christians have in common to how Christians differ from each other. He is discussing variety and individuality within the unity of the Spirit. God has given each believer at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:1–12), and this gift is to be used for the unifying and edifying (building up) of the body of Christ. We must make a distinction between

“spiritual gifts” and natural abilities. When you were born into this world God gave you certain natural abilities, perhaps in mechanics, art, athletics, or music. In this regard, all men are not created equal, because some are smarter, or stronger, or more talented than others. But in the spiritual realm, each believer has at least one spiritual gift no matter what natural abilities he may or may not possess. A spiritual gift is a God-given ability to serve God and other Christians in such a way that Christ is glorified, and believers are edified.

How does the believer discover and develop his gifts? By fellowshiping with other Christians in the local assembly. Gifts are not toys to play with. They are tools to build with. And if they are not used in love, they become weapons to fight with, which is what happened in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 12–14). Christians are not to live in isolation, for after all, they are members of the same body.

Paul taught that Christ is the Giver of these gifts, through the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:8–10). He ascended to heaven as Victor forevermore. The picture here is of a military conqueror leading his captives and sharing the spoil with his followers. Only in this case, the “captives” are not His enemies, but His own. Sinners who once were held captives by sin and Satan have now been taken captive by Christ. Even death itself is a defeated foe! When He came to earth, Christ experienced the depths of humiliation (Phil. 2:5–11), but when He ascended to heaven, He experienced the very highest exaltation possible. Paul quotes Psalm 68:18, applying to Jesus Christ a victory song written by David (Eph. 4:8).

There are three lists of spiritual gifts given in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 27–31; Romans 12:3–8; and Ephesians 4:11. Since these lists are not identical, it may be that Paul has not named all the gifts that are available. Paul wrote that some gifts are more important than others, but that all believers are needed if the body is to function normally (1 Cor. 14:5, 39). Paul named, not so much “gifts” as the gifted men God has placed in the church, and there are four of them.

**Apostles (v. 11a).** The word means “one who is sent with a commission.” Jesus had many disciples, but He selected 12 Apostles (Matt. 10:1–4). A *disciple* is a “follower” or a “learner,” but an *apostle* is a “divinely appointed representative.” The Apostles were to give witness of the Resurrection (Acts 1:15–22), and therefore had to have seen the risen Christ personally (1 Cor. 9:1–2). There are no apostles today in the strictest New Testament sense. These men helped to lay the foundation of the church—“the foundation laid by the Apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20), and once the foundation was laid, they were no longer needed. God authenticated their ministry with special miracles (Heb. 2:1–4), so we should not demand these same miracles today. Of course, in a broad sense, all Christians have an apostolic ministry. “As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). But we must not claim to be apostles.

**Prophets (v. 11b).** We commonly associate a prophet with predictions of future events, but this is not his primary function. A New Testament prophet is one who proclaims the Word of God (Acts 11:28; Eph. 3:5). Believers in the New Testament churches did not possess Bibles, nor was the New Testament written and completed. How, then, would these local assemblies discover God’s will? His Spirit would share God’s truth with those possessing the gift of prophecy. Paul suggests that the gift of prophecy had to do with understanding “all mysteries and all knowledge” (1 Cor. 13:2), meaning, of course, spiritual truths. The purpose of prophecy is “edification, encouragement, and consolation” (1 Cor. 14:3, literal translation). Christians today do not get their spiritual knowledge *immediately* from the Holy Spirit, but *mediately* through the Spirit teaching the Word. With the Apostles, the prophets had a foundational ministry in the early church and they are not needed today (Eph. 2:20).

**Evangelists (v. 11c).** “Bearers of the Good News.” These men traveled from place to place to preach the Gospel and win the lost (Acts 8:26–40; 21:28). All ministers should “do the work of an evangelist,” but this does not mean that all ministers are evangelists (2 Tim. 4:5). The Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church, and the evangelists built on it by winning the lost to Christ. Of course, in the early church, every believer was a witness (Acts 2:41–47; 11:19–21), and so should we be witnesses today. But there are people also today who have the gift of evangelism. The fact that a believer may not possess this gift does not excuse him from being burdened for lost souls or witnessing to them.

**Pastors and teachers (v. 11d).** The fact that the word “some” is not repeated indicates that we have here one office with two ministries. *Pastor* means “shepherd,” indicating that the local church is a flock of sheep (Acts 20:28), and it is his responsibility to feed and lead the flock (1 Peter 5:1–4, where “elder” is another name for “pastor”). He does this by means of the Word of God, the food that nourishes the sheep. The Word is the staff that guides and disciplines the sheep. The Word of God is the local church’s protection and provision, and no amount of entertainment, good fellowship, or other religious substitutes can take its place.

### **The Growth of Unity (Eph. 4:12–16)**

Paul was looking at the church on two levels in this section. He saw the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, growing gradually until it reaches spiritual maturity, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” But he also saw the local body of believers ministering to each other, growing together, and thereby experiencing spiritual unity.

A free-lance missionary visited a pastor friend of mine asking for financial support. “What group are you associated with?” my friend asked.

The man replied, “I belong to the invisible church.”

My friend then asked, “Well, what church are you a member of?”

Again he got the answer, “I belong to the invisible church!”

Getting a bit suspicious, my friend asked, “When does this invisible church meet? Who pastors it?”

The missionary then became incensed and said, “Well, your church here isn’t the true church. I belong to the invisible church!”

My friend replied, “Well, here’s some invisible money to help you minister to the invisible church!”

Now, my pastor friend was not denying the existence of the one body. Rather, he was affirming the fact that the *invisible church* (not a biblical term, but I will use it) ministers through *the visible church*.

The gifted leaders are supposed to “equip the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the body of Christ” (literal translation). The saints do not call a pastor and pay him to do the work. They call him and follow his leadership as he, through the Word, equips them to do the job (2 Tim. 3:13–17). The members of the church grow by feeding on the Word and ministering to each other. The first evidence of spiritual growth is *Christlikeness*.

The second evidence is *stability*. The maturing Christian is not tossed about by every religious novelty that comes along. There are religious quacks waiting to kidnap God’s children and get them into their false cults, but the maturing believer recognizes false doctrine and stays clear of it. The cultists do not try to win lost souls to Christ. They do not establish rescue missions in the slum areas of our cities, because they have no good news for the man on skid row. Instead, these false teachers try to capture immature Christians, and for this reason, most of

the membership of the false cults comes from local churches, particularly churches that do not feed their people the Word of God.

The third evidence of maturity is *truth joined with love*: “Speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. Little children do not know how to blend truth and love. They think that if you love someone, you must shield him from the truth if knowing the truth will hurt him. It is a mark of maturity when we are able to share the truth with our fellow Christians and do it in love. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Prov. 27:6).

One more evidence of maturity is *cooperation* (Eph. 4:16). We realize that, as members of the one body and a local body, we belong to each other, we affect each other, and we need each other. Each believer, no matter how insignificant he may appear, has a ministry to other believers. The body grows as the individual members grow, and they grow as they feed on the Word and minister to each other. Note once again the emphasis on love: “forbearing one another in love” (Eph. 4:2); “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15); “the edifying of itself in love” (4:16). Love is the circulatory system of the body. It has been discovered that isolated, unloved babies do not grow properly and are especially susceptible to disease, while babies who are loved and handled grow normally and are stronger. So it is with the children of God. An isolated Christian cannot minister to others, nor can others minister to him, and it is impossible for the gifts to be ministered either way.

So, then, spiritual unity is not something we manufacture. It is something we already have in Christ, and we must protect and maintain it. Truth unites, but lies divide. Love unites, but selfishness divides. Therefore, “speaking the truth in love,” let us equip one another and edify one another, that all of us may grow up to be more like Christ.

**Hoehner, H. W. (1985). *Ephesians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 632-636) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

#### A. *Walking in unity (4:1–16)*

Having explained the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers and having prayed for that unity through mutually experiencing Christ’s love, Paul now showed how they were to walk in the unity of that body. This is accomplished by gifted people given to the church by Christ so that the body of Christ might grow up in all areas.

##### 1. THE BASIS OF UNITY (4:1–6)

###### a. *Exhortation to unity (4:1–3)*.

4:1. Paul exhorted them to walk (**live a life**) **worthy of their calling**. The NIV gives the impression that this walk should be on the basis that Paul was **a prisoner for the Lord**. However, the Greek does not connote this. Rather it is, “Therefore (rather than **then**) I, the prisoner of the Lord (as already stated in 3:1), beseech you to walk worthy of your calling.” Thus, on the basis of what Paul wrote in chapters 1–3 he implored them to walk worthily. The word “worthy” (*axiōs*) means “equal weight”; one’s calling and conduct should be in balance. “The calling” refers not only to believers’ salvation (cf. Rom. 1:5–6; 1 Cor. 1:9) but also to their



union in one body. Therefore, a Christian's conduct concerns both his personal life and his responsibility to other believers in the church.

4:2–3. Believers' attitudes are also important. Paul listed three virtues that are to enhance a believer's walk. The first of these is humility. In Greek culture, humility was thought of as a vice, to be practiced only by slaves. But Paul stated that saints should **be completely humble** in their daily walks. This is the opposite of pride. On the other hand, Christians should not promote false humility, but should recognize who they are in God's program (cf. John 3:30; Rom. 12:3). This virtue is listed first because of Paul's emphasis on unity (pride promotes disunity; humility promotes unity) and to counteract their past pride, so as to facilitate obedience to and dependence on God. Christ was the supreme example of humility (Phil. 2:6–8).

Second, a believer is to be **gentle** or "meek" (*prautētos*; cf. the adverb of this word in Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25 and the noun in Gal. 5:23; Col. 3:12; 1 Peter 3:16). This is the opposite of self-assertion, rudeness, and harshness. It suggests having one's emotions under control. But it does not suggest weakness. It is the mean between one who is angry all the time and one who is never angry. One who is controlled by God is angry at the right time but never angry at the wrong time. Moses was known as the meekest of all men (Num. 12:3, KJV). Yet he got angry when Israel sinned against God (Ex. 32). Christ was meek and humble in heart (Matt. 11:29). Yet He became angry because some Jews were using the temple as a place for thieves (Matt. 21:12–13).

Third, believers should exhibit patience (*makrothymias*). Patience is the spirit which never gives up for it endures to the end even in times of adversity (James 5:10). It is the self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong (cf. Gal. 5:22; Col. 1:11; 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:2).

Attitudes of humility, gentleness, and patience foster unity among Christians. Having stated these three virtues, Paul then stated the manner in which they are to be carried out in one's conduct: **bearing with one another in love** and making **every effort** (the Gr. has a participle, "making every diligent effort") **to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace**. Christians are not to make unity but to keep or guard what God made in creating the "one new man" (Eph. 2:15–16). They are to keep this unity "through the bond" which consists of "peace." Concern for peace will mean that Christians will lovingly tolerate each other, even when they have differences.

#### *b. Elements of unity (4:4–6).*

4:4. Without a conjunction Paul listed the seven elements of unity centered on the three Persons of the Trinity. These provide the basis for the spirit of unity that should exist in the body of believers. **One body** refers to the universal church, all believers (1:23; 2:16; 3:6). **One Spirit** is the Holy Spirit who indwells the church (2:22). The words, **just as you were called to one hope when you were called**, indicate that all believers have a common hope regarding their future with God (cf. 1 Peter 1:3; 3:15), a confidence that began at the time they were "called" to salvation (Eph. 1:4, 18; 2:7; 4:1).

4:5. **One Lord** (cf. Rom. 10:12) refers to Christ, the Head of the church (Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:18). **One faith** speaks, most likely, not of objective faith, that is, the body of truth believed by Christians (as in Acts 6:7; 1 Tim. 3:9; 4:1, 6; Jude 3) but subjective faith which is exercised by all Christians in Christ their Lord (cf. Col. 2:7). **One baptism** may refer to water baptism, the outward symbol of the inward reality, or it may refer to a believer's identification with Christ and His death (Rom. 6:1–11; Gal. 3:27). It seems unlikely that this refers to the latter, Spirit baptism, because it is in the triad of elements that pertain to Christ, the second Person of the Trinity. Also nothing in the broader context (Eph. 4:1–16) suggests that this is the Spirit's

baptism. If it refers to water baptism, then the idea is that by this single act believers demonstrate their spiritual unity.

4:6. **One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all** refers to God the Father and His relationship to all believers. The fourfold use of “all” refers to “all believers,” not “all mankind.” Certainly, these characteristics are not common to all people. God is the Father “of” all who believe; they are His children (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26). And He is “over” all them as their Sovereign. He lives “through” them and manifests Himself “in” them.

Two observations should be noted about this list of seven unifying elements (Eph. 4:4–6). First, the Trinity is an integral part of the list. The one body of believers is vitalized by one *Spirit*, so all believers have one hope. That body is united to its one *Lord* (Christ) by each member’s one act of faith, and its identity with Him is depicted by one baptism. One *God*, the Father, is supreme over all, operative through all, and resides in all. All seven components are united in the Trinity.

Second, the order in the listing of the three Persons of the Trinity is interesting. Paul began with the Holy Spirit rather than with the Father. The reason for this is that in the preceding verses he was discussing “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3) and in verses 7–13 he discussed the gifts of the Spirit. The same order of Trinity Members is given in 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, where Paul also discussed the gifts of the Spirit.

## 2. THE PRESERVATION OF UNITY (4:7–16)

After discussing the basis of unity (vv. 1–6), Paul now analyzed the means of preserving that unity (cf. “keep the unity,” v. 3) of the body by means of the various gifts.

### a. *The distribution of the gifts (4:7–11).*

4:7–8. Previously Paul discussed the unity of the entire church (vv. 1–6). Now he discussed the diversity within the church (cf. unity in 1 Cor. 12:12–13, and diversity in 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 14–20). From God **each** believer receives **grace** or enablement (cf. Eph. 3:2, 7–8) **as Christ apportioned it** (lit., “according to the measure [*metron*, also used in 4:13, 16]; of the gift of Christ,” i.e., the gift He is pleased to give). Each believer is to function in Christ’s body by God’s enablement, proportionate to the gift (spiritual ability) bestowed on him, no more and no less. This means that a variety of gifts will be exercised, as seen in verse 11; Romans 12:4–6; and 1 Corinthians 12:4–6. Furthermore, since each believer receives “grace,” clergy and laity—to use a common present-day distinction—are on the same level in exercising their gifts.

Ephesians 4:8 includes a quotation from the Old Testament, which confirms God’s giving of gifts. Most think it quotes Psalm 68:18 with five minor and two major changes. The two major variations are the change from the second to the third person, and the change of direction from having received gifts from men to the giving of **gifts to men**. However, it is better to think that Paul was not quoting one particular verse of the psalm but rather that he was summarizing all of Psalm 68, which has many words similar to those in Psalm 68:18. The essence of the psalm is that a military victor has the right to give gifts to those who are identified with him. Christ, having captivated sinful people by redeeming them, is Victor and gives them as gifts to the church. Whereas Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 speak of gifts given to believers, Ephesians 4:7 speaks more of gifted believers given to the church (cf. v. 11).

4:9–10. Verses 9–11 serve as a commentary on two words of the quotation in verse 8, namely, **ascended** (vv. 9–10) and “gave” (v. 11). In verses 9–10 Paul commented on the words

**He ascended.** These two verses are parenthetical in thought because the issue of the passage is the giving of gifts. Before Christ could ascend He had to descend. What is meant by **to the lower, earthly regions**, literally, “into the lower parts of earth”? The genitive “of” can be taken in three ways: (1) “Into the lower parts, namely, the earth” (a genitive of apposition). This would refer to Christ’s incarnation, His “descent” to the earth. (2) “Into the parts lower than the earth” (a genitive of comparison). This would mean that Christ descended into hades between His death and resurrection. (3) “Into the lower parts which belong to the earth” (a genitive of possession). This would refer to Christ’s death and His burial in the grave. The third view best fits the context because in His death Christ had victory over sin and redeemed those who would be given as “gifts” to the church.

Christ’s ascent above **the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe** probably refers to His regal relationship with the whole world, from which position He bestows gifts as He wills because of His work on the Cross. This fits well with 1:23, which speaks of Christ imparting all the fullness of His blessings to the church and to the universe. Christ, who embodies the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9), fills the universe and is Head over it (cf. Col. 1:18).

4:11. This verse is a commentary on the second part of the quotation in verse 8, namely, Christ’s giving gifts to Christians. The gifts to the church are gifted people. The subject **He** is emphatic in the Greek to denote that Christ Himself gives the gifted people. Five kinds of gifted people are listed in the predicate accusative, so the NIV correctly translates, **gave some to be**. The first two, **apostles** and **prophets**, were already mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5 as the foundational gifts to the church. The apostles include the Twelve, who had the office of apostleship by virtue of being with Christ (Acts 1:21–22) and having been appointed by Him (which would also include Paul; 1 Cor. 15:8–9; Gal. 1:1; 2:6–9). But “apostles” also included others who were recognized as apostles, such as James (1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor. 9:6), Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7), possibly Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:7), and Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6, 9). This latter group had the gift of apostleship but not the apostolic “office” as did the Twelve and Paul. Apostles, then, were those who carried the gospel message with God’s authority. “Apostle” means “one sent as an authoritative delegate.”

New Testament prophets were gifts to the church to provide edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3). They probably revealed God’s will to the church when the biblical canon was incomplete. Since the apostles and prophets were foundational, they did not exist after the first generation of believers.

**Evangelists** were those engaged in spreading the gospel, similar to present-day missionaries. **Pastors and teachers** are listed together because they are governed by one article (“the” occurs before “pastors” but not before “teachers”) and because the word “and” (*kai*) differs from the other “and’s” (*de*) in the verse. This may imply that these are two kinds of gifted people whose ministries are among settled congregations (rather than itinerant ministries like those of the apostles and evangelists). More likely, they refer to two characteristics of the same person who is pastoring believers (by comforting and guiding) while at the same time instructing them in God’s ways (overseers or elders are to be able to teach; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9).

#### *b. The intention of the gifts (4:12–16)*

The purpose of the gifted believers (vv. 7–11) is to equip other believers for the ministry so as to give them stability doctrinally and practically and thus lead them to mutual edification. Like several other passages in Ephesians (1:3–14, 15–23; 2:1–7; 3:1–13, 14–19; 4:1–7; 6:14–20), 4:11–16 is one long sentence in Greek.

4:12. The purpose of the gifted men is **to prepare God's people for works of service**. More literally, this purpose is “for the perfecting or equipping (*katartismōn*; cf. the verb *katartizō* in Matt. 4:21, ‘mending’ or ‘preparing’ nets; in Gal. 6:1, ‘restore’ for proper use; cf. 2 Cor. 13:11; Heb. 13:21) of the saints unto the work of the ministry” (*diakonias*). Gifted people (Eph. 4:11) are to minister the Word to others so that they in turn are readied to get involved in ministering to others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). The goal of all this is the building up or edifying of **the body of Christ** (cf. Eph. 4:16). This shows that all saints and not just a few leaders should be involved in the “ministry.” All saints are gifted (v. 7) to serve others spiritually.

4:13. Gifted people are to minister till **all** the church attains (**reach** translates *katantēsōmen*, used in Acts of travelers arriving at their destinations) the three goals, each introduced by the Greek preposition (*eis*, “unto”): literally, (1) “unto the **unity of the faith** (cf. Eph. 4:5) **and full knowledge** (*epignōseōs*; cf. 1:17) **of the Son of God**,” (2) “unto a **mature man**,” and (3) “unto the **measure** (*metron*; cf. 4:7, 13) of the stature **of the fullness of Christ**.” As each believer functions in accord with the gift(s) Christ has given him (v. 7) the body as a whole enjoys unity (cf. vv. 3–6) and becomes more spiritually mature (cf. v. 15), more like Jesus Christ in all His fullness (cf. 1:23; 3:19).

4:14–16. Here Paul expressed the ultimate purpose, or perhaps better, the result (*hina*) of gifted people equipping saints to serve the Lord and others. Negatively, believers should not **be** like immature **infants** who are easily swayed and confused, like **waves** being **tossed back and forth** (cf. Luke 8:24; James 1:6) **and blown here and there** (lit., “whirled around,” a violent swinging that makes one dizzy) **by every gust of wind of teaching ... by the cunning**, better, “trickery” (*kybeia*, lit., “dice-playing”) **of men in their deceitful scheming** (*panourgia*, also used in Luke 20:23; 1 Cor. 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:2; 11:3), moving toward (*pros* indicates goal) a system of error. False teachers cause this kind of confusion regarding the truth in order to try to bring believers into their erroneous schemes. In contrast (*de*, Eph. 4:15) Paul stated positively that by **speaking the truth in love** (lit., “truthing in love,” which has the idea of maintaining truth in love in both speech and life) believers may **grow up into Him** with reference to **all things**. Christ, then, is the Source of a believer's growth and also the Aim and Goal of his growth (cf. v. 13). From the Head (cf. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18) the body derives its **whole** capacity for growth and activity (Eph. 4:16). Each member of the body is **joined** (2:21) by being carefully fitted **together**, and each member is held or brought together **by** means of **every supporting ligament** (cf. Col. 2:19) according to the standard (*kata*, with the accusative) of the measured working (*metrō*, from *metron*) of each individual. This causes the body of Christ to grow (cf. Eph. 4:15) and build **itself up** (cf. v. 12) **in love**. The phrase “in love” occurs three times (vv. 2, 15–16), thus pointing to the way unity is maintained. Significantly the word “measure” (*metron*) is also used three times in this context (vv. 7, 13, 16). Each believer is to function in Christ's body by God's enabling grace in accord with the measure of the gift Christ bestowed on him (v. 7). When each believer accomplishes that measure, then the church **grows** properly (v. 16), coming ultimately to the measure of Christlikeness (v. 13). Stunted growth comes when one does not allow his or others' gifts to function.

The preservation of unity is the responsibility of God's gifted people in the church (vv. 7–16). In this unity of structure is variety of function. Paul emphasized body growth, not self-growth. **Each** individual contributes to this unified growth as he allows his particular gift(s) to function.

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 579-580). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

### **THE CHURCH (4:1–6)**

Ephesians is the perfect balance between doctrine and duty. The first three chapters deal with doctrine, the believers' spiritual blessings in Christ. The last three chapters focus on the church's responsibility to live in unity, variety, maturity, purity, and victory. We learn from Paul's balanced perspective the need for both orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right living).

Commentators have suggested that the pivotal verse of the entire letter—indeed, the key that unlocks its structure—is 4:1. It brings together the themes of chapters 1–3 and in a stirring appeal announces Paul's emphasis of chapters 4–6. The church's privileged position and calling carries with it weighty responsibilities. Paul exhorted the church to worthy living. He emphasized the character and effort required for such exemplary living. Then with characteristic Trinitarian emphasis the apostle claimed the church could so live because it is energized by the Spirit, established by the Lord, and empowered by the Father.

### **THE CHURCH'S GIFTS (4:7–16)**

Borrowing an illustration from Psalm 68:18, Paul described the gifts given to the church. God is both sovereign and generous in His distribution of the various gifts.

The gifts in fact are gifted persons: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (or pastor-teachers). Apostles and prophets were already mentioned in 2:20 and 3:5 as the foundational gifts to the church. In a strict sense apostles were witnesses of Christ's resurrection and were commissioned by Him to preach. It broadly included those associated with such men, who also were commissioned for ministry (for example, see Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Thess. 2:6). Prophets, under the direct inspiration of God, carried out a preaching ministry that included both foretelling and forthtelling.

Evangelists ministered in a manner itinerant and external from the church. They were missionaries to the unconverted empowered with special insight into the gospel's meaning. Pastors and teachers most likely constituted two sides of one ministry. This ministry was indigenous and internal to the church. Persons with this gift shepherd the flock and instruct them in divine truth.

All of these gifted people carry out equipping ministries so that service ministries can be actualized. Or as Paul put it, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith".

Paul stated the goal of the church in 4:13–16. The church is to grow up in Christ so it will avoid spiritual immaturity, instability, and gullibility. The atmosphere of spiritual maturity is described in terms of truth and love. Maturity is defined totally in relationship to the corporate Christian body. Maturity is an ongoing process of being "joined and held together" in relationship with the body of Christ.

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Ephesians 4:1-16). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***