

typical first century line of argument here. He who ascends must first have descended. What goes up must first have come down. And obviously, he who came down and then ascended is Jesus Christ. This proves that it is justifiable to apply the Psalm to Christ and his church.

(If an inspired apostle says there was a hidden meaning in a Psalm, I will accept it on his authority. If an uninspired interpreter tries to make a clever parallel, I will not be impressed.)

into the lower parts of the earth?—The “lower parts of the earth” is probably another way of saying that Jesus went down into death or Hades. (See Phil. 2:8; Rom. 10:6; Acts 2:27.) It is possible, however, that the “lower parts” simply refers to earth itself, which is “lower” than the heavenly home from which Jesus came.

V. 10 He who descended is he who also ascended—Jesus Christ, who became obedient even unto death, was highly exalted by the Father (Phil. 2:9). God raised Jesus from the dead and lifted him up to his right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20).

far above all the heavens—The imagery of these words is much the same as Eph. 1:21 “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named.” Jesus, with the Father, is at the top.

that he might fill all things—As in Eph. 1:23, Jesus is the one who “fills all in all.” From his position of superiority over all the universe, Jesus sustains (Heb. 1:3) and holds together all things (Col. 1:17).

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of “therefore” in verse one?
2. Is it possible to lead a life that is really “worthy” of our calling?
3. How would you contrast the view of the world toward “lowliness” or humble-mindedness with the view of Christians?
4. How is it possible to be patient and forbearing with people who are stupid and foolish?
5. What are the seven basic “one’s” named in verses four through six? Can you recite them from memory?

6. If there is only one body, why are there so many denominations?
7. What is the one baptism which all Christians shared in the first century?
8. God wants unity. We all want unity. We could have unity if everybody would come and join me. (What is wrong with this approach?)
9. What is shown about the character of Christ, when in his victory over the hosts of Satan he “gave gifts to men”?
10. How was Paul justified in applying Psalm 68:18 to Christ? Can you express the line of argument from verses nine and ten in your own words?

Lesson Eight (4:11-16)

So We May All Grow Up 4:11-16

11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipment of the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.

The master plan for the church is given in these verses. Not only are the job descriptions laid out for us, but the reason behind the jobs is also given. The ultimate purpose of the body is to grow up into the head. The ultimate purpose of a man’s salvation is to come to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

V. 11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles—The first of Christ’s gifts to the church were the apostles. These men were hand-picked by Jesus to be his representatives on earth after he ascended into heaven. They were promised inspiration (John 14:26) and their preaching was to carry authority (John 20:23). These were “men sent forth” who turned the world upside down for Christ.

With the exception of Judas Iscariot, who hanged himself before the church began, no provision was ever made for the successive replacement of apostles. They served as the *foundation* of the church, and do not need continual successors (Eph. 2:20). They and their close associates gave us the New Testament scriptures, which perpetuate that foundation. We have no need for new apostles and new scriptures.

some prophets—In the early church some people had the gift of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10, 28). These prophets possessed the gift of speaking forth a message directly from God, usually with prediction concerning the future. Especially in the early years, before the New Testament was written and copied and circulated to all the churches, this gift was vital to the strength of a congregation.

Just as with apostles, the prophets did not provide for their successors. They were foundational, not a permanent office in every generation. (See Eph. 2:20 and 1 Cor. 13:8-10). The sufficiency of the scriptures makes prophets unnecessary.

some evangelists—Evangelists are those who proclaim the “good news” of the Gospel. (The Greek word for gospel is *euangelion*.) The evangelists carried the Gospel to people who had not heard it, planting new churches wherever they went.

Unlike apostles and prophets, evangelists are found in every generation of the church. The work of evangelism has been given to the church “to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). As long as there are still people who need to be won to the Lord, the evangelist and his work will continue.

some pastors and teachers—It is not enough to win a man to Christ. That man must also be shepherded and taught as he grows to maturity in Christ. For this reason the church has also been supplied with pastors and teachers.

The word “pastor” is the common Greek word for a shepherd. It is used interchangeably in the New Testament with the terms “elder” and “overseer” (“bishop”). (1 Pet. 5:1-5; Acts 20:28.) The structure of the Greek grammar links pastors and teachers together as a single office. (See that overseers must be “apt teachers” in 1 Tim. 3:2.)

As long as there are still people who need to be taught the way of the Lord, the work of the pastor and teacher will continue.

V. 12 for the equipment of the saints—God did not give the offices of leadership so that certain men could feel important or arrogant in their authority. Neither did God put the leaders to work so that they could do all the work of the church single-handedly. God gave the church leaders to equip the saints.

The Greek word for “equipment” is used thirteen times as a verb in the New Testament. A summary of these uses will show quite clearly what is to be done for “the saints.” The word means:

1. To teach (Luke 6:40)
2. To equip with everything good (Heb. 13:21)
3. To supply what is lacking (1 Thess. 3:10)
4. To prepare for use (Heb. 10:5)
5. To form, mold, and shape (Heb. 11:3)
6. To mend and repair (Matt. 4:21)
7. To correct faults (2 Cor. 13:11)
8. To restore a fallen brother (Gal. 6:1)
9. To bring into functioning harmony (1 Cor. 1:10)

Jesus said “When a disciple is fully taught (equipped) he will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

The “saints” who are to be equipped are all God’s “holy” children who have been “set apart” to him. In the scriptural use of the word, a saint is simply a Christian, and every Christian is a saint.

Unfortunately, in recent years some church leaders have used the concept of the “equipping ministry” to excuse themselves from doing any of the work themselves. They ignore the work of soul-winning, hospital visitation, Bible School, youth programs, etc., saying, “That’s not my job. My job is to find people in the church and put them to work.” Such a person has overlooked the fact that people learn best by example. The way to equip saints for service is to work with them and become a model for them. The concept of the “job-finder” who spends his time fitting workers to the right jobs is totally foreign to the New Testament.

for the work of ministry—The saints are to be equipped to do the work of ministry. Ministry means simply “service,” (see 3:7) and anyone who serves people and meets their needs is a minister. In the scriptural use of the word, to minister or serve includes:

1. Providing food (Luke 8:3)
2. Waiting tables (Acts 6:2)
3. Meeting physical needs (Matt. 25:44)
4. Delivering famine relief money (Rom. 15:25)
5. Serve as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:10)
6. Proclaiming the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:12)

Two-thirds of the sixty-six uses of “ministry” or “to minister” in the New Testament have to do with meeting physical needs.

To involve the saints in “ministry” is much more than using a few of them on Sunday morning on the platform. If we continue to limit our concept of “ministry” to the Sunday services of the church, there is no way all the saints can serve. If we will realize that even giving a cup of water in Jesus’ name qualifies as “ministry,” great opportunities for service will open. People will find fulfillment using their God-given abilities to help other people.

The key to gaining the right focus on ministry is to stop thinking of serving the “church program” and start thinking of serving people. Then all the abilities and functions of the members of the body will be usable. Consider the following chart:

<i>What Can I Do?</i>	<i>For Church Program</i>	<i>For People</i>
Bake Cookies	V.B.S. (once a year)	Rest homes Newcomers Service men College students
Drive a car	Bring people to church	Taxi for elderly Meals on wheels
Mow grass	Mow church lawn	Mow widow’s lawn
Give money	Tithe	Help family deserted by father Help widows
Go fishing	None	Be a “father” to a boy who has none
Fix motors	None, unless church owns a bus	Keep widow’s car running

The abilities and applications could be expanded infinitely. Is any act of service named above not qualified to count as “ministry”? Is any more worthy, or less, than another? Is the body really functioning until all the applications—for *both* the church program and the people—are working? Please remember that the church is the *people*, so what is done for the people is done for the church.

for building up the body of Christ—People grow to maturity through service. So long as the saints are merely consumers of the church program product, they will remain immature and selfish. Just as Christ came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:28), so must his

body learn the satisfaction that comes from being concerned about the needs of other people rather than one’s own needs.

The Lord’s plan for building up the body has beautiful balance. He has first provided leadership for the church and its activities, then a pattern of service for all the saints.

V. 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith—The pattern for the New Testament church calls for the maturing of each member through service. This is a people-centered, not a program-centered, pattern.

The “unity of the faith” we seek is not doctrinal conformity. We will never agree in all our opinions. Instead, Paul is thinking of faith as total trust and commitment to Jesus Christ. It is the commitment in which we must be united.

and of the knowledge of the Son of God—This is not an intellectual knowledge of all the facts about Jesus. It is personal involvement with him (Eph. 3:19). At the same time, this personal experience is also a corporate experience. We all attain this spiritual maturity together as a body, not as isolated spokes on a wheel.

to mature manhood—Spiritual manhood means full-grown completeness in becoming mature Christians. It does not mean total perfection. It stands in sharp contrast to the “children” of the next verse.

to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—If any man thinks he may already have arrived at completeness, let him stand up to the measuring rod of Christ. Jesus is our perfect standard, and although we will never match his perfection, we must never aim for anything less.

V. 14 so that we may no longer be children—God wants us childlike, but not childish. So long as we are immature and unstable we are at the mercy of many perils. Just as a parent is relieved when his child learns to avoid fire or poisons, God is eager for his children to grow up.

tossed to and fro—Literally, tossed around by waves or rough water.

carried about with every wind of doctrine—The storms of life bring many adverse waves and winds. Among the greatest dangers is the peril of being swept away by a wind of false teaching. The immature Christian is defenseless and unable to cope with each new radio preacher or door-to-door cult salesman. The church leaders may try to protect them, like a hen scurrying after her chicks, but unless the church is very tiny it is impossible to keep a close eye on everyone. The only solution is maturity.

by the cunning of men—False teachers are clever. Since they are not limited to working with the truth, they

can shape their teaching to make it attractive and appealing. They have plenty of tricks, as is shown by the word “cunning,” which is taken from the Greek word for dice used in gambling.

by their craftiness in deceitful wiles—“Craftiness” comes from the Greek word for sly villainy, especially the practice of adulterating a product before it is sold. “Deceitful wiles” is literally “the clever strategies of error.” Christians must arm themselves against these wiles (Eph. 6:11), remembering that their foe is the father of lies (John 8:44).

V. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love—We do not combat Satan’s lies with clever tricks of our own. We fight with the armor of God, which begins with truth (Eph. 6:14). However, this allegiance to truth does not allow us to be blunt and cruel in the pretext of being frank and honest. We must always speak the truth “in love.”

Furthermore, more than our speech is involved here. Our actions, insinuations, and entire lifestyle must be consistent with “truth in love.” The word “speaking” is not actually found in the Greek, which says simply “being truthful in love.”

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head—We must never be content until we have become like Jesus in every respect. To be like him in one or two virtues is not enough.

Individually we look to Christ as the perfect model for mature manhood. Collectively, we grow up together into him as the head of the body. The relationship of the church to Christ as a body to a head has several implications:

1. He is the source of our life. Life and energy flow down from the head throughout the body. (At least, this was the concept of “head” when Paul chose to use it to describe Christ’s relation to the church.)
2. He is the purpose and direction of all our actions. Every activity of the body flows up to the head.
3. He is our chief, with authority to direct our actions. The use of “head” as a ruling authority is well-documented in the Greek of this period.

V. 16 from whom the whole body—Paul uses beautiful imagery here. Not only does the body grow up into the head, it also functions from the head. This interplay of spiritual energy is also seen in the figure of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-11).

joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied—The Lord has “joined” each part of the body together as a wise builder “fits together”

each stone in a building (see Eph. 2:21). The word is related to our word “harmony” and emphasizes how the Lord has brought together diverse elements and joined them into harmonious unity. The fact that each member of the body is different from every other member in his abilities and functions is a strength, not a weakness.

In the words “knit together” the emphasis is on the reconciliation of differences. Originally it meant “to cause to walk together.” The word is used in the same context in Col. 2:19.

Each member of the body is united with other members of the body by joints supplied by God. We do not hold the church together—God does. Most of all, God is the source of love, which “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14).

when each part is working properly—Before the bodily growth and edification of this verse is possible, each part of the body must be working properly. This means the leaders must be leading and equipping, and all the saints must be learning and serving. God’s idea of a great church is a church where each member is becoming great through service.

If the mouth must also attempt the function of the hands, the whole body is impaired. If the hands must be used for talking, they must leave off what they would otherwise have done. I suppose that if my mouth were the only part of my body still functioning, I would try to use it in as many ways as possible. But God’s desire is for a body that is fully functional. (In other words, there are many body functions which could be better done by a member other than the mouth—the preacher!)

makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love—When each part is working properly the body will grow. It will grow in size, in coordination, in usefulness. It will grow with a growth that is from God (Col. 2:19).

In many ways the growth of the church is similar to the growth of the human body. Similarly, many of the undesirable conditions of human growth are also possible in the church. Apply the following to the church:

1. Dwarfism—Although mental growth continues, the body does not grow in size. Sometimes this condition is accompanied by mental retardation as well.
2. Cretinism—Although physical growth continues, the mental power of the body does not grow. This is a form of idiocy.
3. Deformity—Certain parts of the body do not grow in the pattern or shape intended for them.
4. Obesity—Although the mind and much of the body are normal, there is an

encumbrance of fat tissue. This tissue serves no real function, except to drag down the rest of the body.

5. Paralysis—Although the mind is alert, certain parts of the body refuse to respond to directions and do nothing.
6. Spasticism—Although the mind and muscles are fine, there is a communication and coordination gap. Each member of the body is “doing its own thing,” without regard for anyone else.

Study Questions

1. What was the role of apostles and prophets in the foundation of the church?
2. What is the work of the evangelist and the pastor and teacher?
3. What all is involved in “equipping the saints”?
4. What is the biblical concept of “ministry”? Have you decided to go into the ministry?
5. Does “unity of the faith” mean we will all have the same ideas about the Bible?
6. Jesus commended childlikeness (Matt. 18:1-4). What is it about children that Paul opposes?
7. Why can’t we combat Satan’s lies and tricks with a few clever schemes of our own?
8. What does the head do for the body?
9. What is the secret of making growth, according to verse sixteen?
10. Are all kinds of growth good?

11. QUESTION FOR ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Where do preachers fit in this picture of church leadership? Do they function in more than one category? Is it wrong to serve in more than one area? Did Paul himself do so?

Lesson Nine (4:17-24)

No Longer in Futility (4:17-24)

17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; 18 they are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart; 19 they have become callous and have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness. 20 You did not so learn Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus. 22 Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

God has not only freed us from sin; he has also freed us from the futility of sinful living. In Christ Jesus it is possible to change human nature. The leopard can change his spots and the sinner can leave his foolish ways. The old life can be shed like an outgrown garment, replaced by the new nature of Christ.

V. 17 Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord—The importance of what follows is underscored by the solemn tone of this statement.

that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do—Most of Paul’s readers were in fact Gentiles by birth. In Christ, however, they were no longer Gentiles by nature. By nature they were new creatures, no longer participating in the old practices of the pagan life. That old life is described by Paul in these eight ways:

1. In futility of mind
2. Darkened in understanding
3. Alienated from the life of God
4. Ignorance
5. Hardness of heart
6. Callous
7. Given up to licentiousness
8. Greedy to practice every kind of uncleanness