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Ephesians 4:1 - 4:11



Ephesians - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses Ephesians 4:1-11, highlighting a turning point in the book. Gregg emphasizes the importance of correct understanding of doctrine, which should result in righteous behavior. Walking worthy of God involves meditating on scripture and walking in truth, meekness, and humility. He notes that true believers seek to follow Jesus, but not everyone will agree, so maintaining peace is crucial. He also highlights that diversity does not equate to disunity, and that God has given gifts to the church, including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, to help build the body of Christ.

Transcript

There is a clear turning point in the book, and you can sort of see that immediately. In verse 1, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. Now, the calling with which you were called is what he's been talking about in all the first three chapters.

We are called according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his own will, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, predestined for adoption. That's a lofty calling. And now seated in Christ in heavenly places and assembled as a growing temple in the Lord, a habitation of God through the Spirit, the body of Christ, all these things that he has laid out for us in the first three chapters have to do with the highness, loftiness, and majesty of the calling that we have.

And he says, okay, it's one thing to have a calling. It's another thing to live appropriately in view of that calling. It's like the turning point in Romans chapter 12 in verse 1. After he's spent 11 chapters laying out theological truth, he turns in Romans 12.1 and says, I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice.

But by the mercies of God means in view of the mercies of God, which have been the topic of discussion in the first 11 chapters of Romans, having said all those things, I beseech you to present yourself to God, present your body to him. And of course, presenting your body to him has to do with the way you live your life. So good behavior

always springs from good doctrine.

Paul first lays out the doctrine and then indicates that as a result of that doctrine, our behavior will follow. Now, there are people who have good behavior without having very good doctrine. But I would say, since Jesus said, the truth will make you free, that the more of the truth you understand, the more free you will be.

The more you know of correct doctrine, the more areas of your life will fall naturally into line with truth. And it's not, I mean, sometimes doctrine is considered to be a boring word, but actually doctrine just means teaching. And the theological teachings of the New Testament are simply there to acquaint us with the nature of reality.

Whereas parts of the scripture tell us what we should do, for example, the chapters that now follow in Ephesians, where we've come to tell us what we should do, there are also parts of the scripture, like the first three chapters of Ephesians, that tell us what is. And there's a difference between being told what is and being told what ought to be or what you should do about it. And if you don't understand correctly what is, you will never quite understand why you should do what you should do.

The instructions of scripture are consonant with the worldview of scripture and the truth and the description of what reality is like that is found in the theological portions. And so Paul has laid out those theological portions in Ephesians 1 through 3, and he says, therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, this is the second time he refers to himself as a prisoner. In chapter 3, verse 1, he also called himself the prisoner of Jesus Christ.

I might just comment that we know that Paul was in Rome in prison when he wrote this epistle, along with Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. And he was really a prisoner of Rome, but he described himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Now, in chapter 3, verse 1, he says, I'm the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

The reason Paul was a prisoner in Rome was because he was a follower of Jesus, and in particular because of his stand he took for the Gentiles. You might remember that when Paul came to Jerusalem last time, he was accused of having sided with the Gentiles in a degree that the Jews considered blasphemous. Even they accused him of bringing a Gentile into that portion of the temple where only Jews were allowed.

So it was because of his stand as an apostle favoring the Gentiles that he was in prison. But it was not so much that he saw the Romans as his captors, as Jesus Christ was his captor. Before he was ever put in jail by the Romans, he had already surrendered to Jesus and was already a slave of Christ, a captive to do Christ's will.

And the fact that he was now in chains and in prison was simply a part of that, one of the repercussions of that, being captive to Christ. He was in chains because he was doing the will of Christ, and this was what Jesus had for him now at this point in his service.

And he was the prisoner of the Lord.

He says, I beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling. Now, the word walk speaks of, as we said previously, simply a metaphor of living, of moving forward in life. As you move forward when you walk geographically, you move forward in time in your life, and walking in distance, in space, is a metaphor in scripture for proceeding through life, through time.

And the steps one takes in proceeding through time consist of decisions, choices that are made. When you walk in the natural sense of that word, walking across a room, or when you intend to walk across a room, you will or will not obtain your goal if you take the correct steps you don't. A person can walk and walk and walk and walk and never end up where he wants to be.

In the case of a person lost in the woods who can't see beyond the few trees that are around him, he hopes that around the next bend, around that tree over there, he thinks he saw it before, he's not sure, that if he makes a turn there, he'll go where he wants to go. But if he can't see clearly where he is, he doesn't have a broad view of the terrain, he may step and step and walk and walk and not end up any closer to where he wanted to be. And life is that way too.

First of all, people who walk in blindness, and the Gentiles are described as doing so, who are not Christians, in Ephesians, walking in the blindness of their hearts, he later is going to say, is how the Gentiles live, then they don't walk properly, they don't walk intelligently, they don't walk where they should go. For example, later in this chapter in Ephesians 4, 17, he says, This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening or blindness of their heart. Now, notice, how do the Gentiles walk? They walk in the futility of their minds because their understanding is darkened, their ignorance is in them, their heart is hardened or blinded, the hardening of their heart in that verse can be translated blindness of their heart also, it's a hard word to translate, and some translators prefer hardness, some prefer blindness.

But the point here is Gentiles walk the way they do because they don't see, they don't know, their mind is darkened, their understanding is darkened. That's why Paul spends three chapters at the beginning of this epistle undarkening, unblinding the eyes, praying for God to open the eyes, to give the spirit of revelation and the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being opened. Because if you don't see the terrain, you can't walk properly.

If you can't see the big picture, you don't know which direction or what steps to take to get to the goal that you want to go to because you can't see the goal. And so vision is the most important part of walking. It's not the most, but it's a most important part, one

of the most.

But in addition to being able to see where you go and where you want to go and what obstacles lie between you and your object, walking involves being able to take steps in a way that is ordered correctly, that you make the steps in the right direction. Wrong steps will end up in a wrong place. Likewise in life, you make your decisions, you take the steps you take in life based upon your vision of spiritual reality.

You make your choices according to your understanding of ultimate things. You choose your career, you choose your educational options, you choose to marry or not to marry and who you'll marry and those kinds of things. All the choices you make, including choices you make many times a day as who you will spend time with and what you will do at that time and how you will spend your money and things like that.

Those choices are made in accordance with a bigger vision of what is, of what reality is, of the spiritual landscape. And so just as the steps you take when you're walking are in accord with your view of the ground and the path and the surroundings, so the decisions you make in life as you walk through life, choice by choice by choice, are made in accord with your big picture vision of the nature of ultimate reality and eternity and those kinds of things. So Paul wants us to understand the big picture, which is why he gave us so much theology at the beginning.

We understand a little more about what we're here for, where we're supposed to be going, what the nature of the landscape is. But now the individual steps we take have to direct us according to that wisdom, according to that vision. And so every choice we make is a choice that will either take us closer to the goal or will take us off on some kind of a side road, which will be detrimental, will prevent us from making progress.

And so we need to walk properly. Now there's many different ways in which a proper or appropriate walk, a worthy walk, is described in scripture. For example, in Psalm 1.1, it says, Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly.

So a worthy walk is not going to be walking according to counsel given by ungodly people, but rather, of course, we know from what that Psalm goes on to say that that man meditates day and night in the law of the Lord. And that is a worthy walk, a walk that is governed by meditation on scripture, as opposed to counsel that comes from ungodly people. We know from Micah chapter 6 and verse 8 that we walk humbly with our God.

That's a worthy way to walk, is to walk humbly. The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5.7 that we walk by faith. That's another aspect of our walk.

In 1 John 2.6, it says that he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. We're supposed to walk as Jesus walked. In Acts chapter 9, chapter

31, it tells us that the church walked in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, Acts 9.31. The church was walking in the fear of the Lord.

John says in 2 John chapter 4 that people should and do, certain people, walk in the truth. That's the right way to walk. That's a worthy walk, to walk in the truth.

In Luke 1.6, we read of John the Baptist's parents that they walked in the commandments of God. They walked in all the commandments of God. So these are places in the script that tell us about how a worthy walk is defined.

Colossians 4.5 says walk in wisdom for those who are outside the church. So of course we know Galatians 5.16 says walk in the spirit. So we have all of these different ways in which the Bible describes a walk that is worthy.

It is a walk that is not according to the counsel of the ungodly. It's walking humbly with God. It's walking by faith.

It's walking even as he walked, Jesus. It's walking in the fear of the Lord. It's walking in the truth.

It's walking in the commandments of God. It's walking in wisdom. It's walking in the spirit.

So this is a worthy walk. Now Paul is going to go on through the remainder of this book of Ephesians and lay out different aspects of how one walks worthy of God. First of all he says in verse two, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, or bearing with one another in love.

There's four things he says right here in this verse. One is that our walk is to be in lowliness. Now lowliness is the same thing as humility.

So that when Micah said you should walk humbly with your God, in Micah 6.8, he's saying the same thing that Paul's saying here, that we should walk with all humility, with all lowliness. The word humility was not used usually in a favorable way in the ancient world. It means to be really low.

It means to be abased. And usually a person who was that way was considered to be not very important. And a person who was humble was not considered to be virtuous in the ancient world.

You have to realize how radically different the Christian message was in its day. In our day, even unbelievers, I suppose, will not disdain a person for being humble. Maybe some will, but we live in a time where Christianity has permeated the thinking of our Western world for thousands of years.

And even those who reject Christ often have become more than they know affected by

the ideas that have been shot through our society and our culture by Christianity. And most people think of a humble person as possibly a good person. I shouldn't say most people, because I don't know what most people think.

My impression is that if someone says that person is very humble, that's not intended as an insult, even among non-Christians. And then if a person is proud and arrogant, that would be considered to be an insult among many non-Christians, not all. But Paul is saying that the Ephesians, who come from a Gentile culture, or the people to whom he's writing in Asia Minor, who have not, prior to their conversion, seen humility as a virtue at all, but as something to be ashamed of, they're now encouraged to be humble and to walk their whole life with all lowliness.

All is a term that is put there in order to emphasize completeness. You need to be completely humble in all areas of life, not having any moments where your pride flares up in your relationships. It's interesting that one of the first things that Romans says when it actually talks about the need to begin walking correctly, I mentioned a moment ago Romans 12, where Paul has the turning point in that book from the theological to the practical section.

When he says in Romans 12, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies, and then he goes on in verse 2, I do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. He then says, verse 3, for I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. So the first order of business, once he passes from the theological section to the practical section, is be humble.

Don't think more highly of yourself than you should. Likewise, in Ephesians chapter 4, the first thing that is listed as part of the correct way to walk is in lowliness or humility. And the impression is given, perhaps, that that's the first order of business from which almost all others flow.

If you are humble, if you have a low view of yourself, in other words, which is what humility is, if you have a low view of yourself, all other behavior is likely to follow fairly naturally. If you are proud, you love yourself. If you are humble, you don't love yourself.

You love others. And if you love others, you are likely to do the things that Christianity calls you to do without much chafing, without much difficulty, because you don't see yourself as worthy of better treatment. You don't see yourself as deserving of your way and so forth.

And so when the demands of Christ call you to die to yourself and to take up a cross and to serve others and do all those things that walking worthy of your calling requires, that's much easier to do if you think yourself worthy of nothing better. And we are, of course, worthy of nothing better. And it's not any help to us that the Church as well as the world

are continually telling us that we need to be better of ourselves, to have a higher self-image and love ourselves and so forth.

That's not what the Bible teaches, and it works against the attitude that would make us eager to make all the sacrifices required to follow Jesus Christ. When people say, you owe it to yourself, you need to serve better, then of course when we are told that, and if we allow ourselves to believe that, then we are going to have a much more difficult time accepting the sacrifices and the death to self many times a day that we are called to experience and to accept in our Christian life. So the first order of business is to get low, is to become humble, to humble yourself.

And you should walk with all lowliness and gentleness. Now gentleness is also translated meekness in some places. It's that word which is alternately translated either way, gentleness or meekness or mildness of character or temperament.

This suggests, of course, not being pushy for one's own way, being willing to yield to others. This is something that arises out of an attitude of humbleness, so that lowliness and gentleness in a sense are a natural sequence of attitudes. Gentleness would be actually the behavior, and lowliness would be the attitude.

From an attitude of humility will come forth behavior that is meek, not demanding one's own way, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love. Now long-suffering is simply the word that would be best translated today as the word patience. In the Bible, at least in the King James Version and in many cases in the New King James Version, the word patience is sometimes used or usually used to speak of what we would really call endurance or perseverance.

Patience in trials is frequently the way the King James and the New King James have used the word patience, in a sense where the Greek word really means something like endurance or perseverance. But the word patience as we use it today, meaning that you remain unruffled when inconvenienced by others, you know, you don't get all hot and bothered when you're made to wait for something, you know, being patient. That's what we usually think of patience as.

The word in the scripture for that is usually in the English translation long-suffering, at least in King James and New King James, as here. Long-suffering means what we mean by patience, being patient with people and bearing with one another in love. Now, all of these qualities are only really possible to have in love.

Actually, in love is a phrase that Paul uses quite a lot in the epistle of the Ephesians. Just like he uses the term in Christ repeatedly, he also uses the term in love repeatedly throughout the epistle. And it is in the context of loving others that our patience and our forbearance with them comes out naturally.

And is not a trial for us. Now, the reason that he exhorts us to all of these attitudes is because his first concern that he talks about, a worthy walk, is a unified church. With all of the lofty things that he has said about the church in the earlier chapters, it is a great tragedy if the church does not hang together, if the church does not work in cooperation with each other, if the members of the church do not love each other but get into petty quarrels and strife and divisions.

And so what he argues for here is the need to keep unity. In verse 3, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Now, that is just the ending of the sentence that begins in verse 1. So that the endeavoring to keep the unity is a product of lowliness, gentleness, patience, and forbearance of each other.

The only way that the unity among Christians can be maintained is if we have these other attitudes. People will not always cater to your preferences. People will not always agree with you.

Sometimes they will be fairly insistent on their own way. Now, if everyone was a good Christian, no one would be doing those things. But since not everyone is a good Christian, it is left to you to be one.

And it takes two to tangle. You cannot have strife, really, if only one person is striving. The other person can forbear.

The other person can be patient. The other person can be humble and make and defer. And that kind of diffuses strife.

And since people will not always be the kind of Christians they should be, it is necessary for you to be the kind of Christian you should be so that unity can be maintained, harmony in relationships. He says that in verse 3, we should endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit. Now, it's not something we need to acquire.

It's something that needs to be kept. God has created the unity of the spirit. He's described that in chapter 2, how that God has broken down the middle wall of division between the Jew and the Gentile, and for that matter, between all parties in the church, and has made in himself one new man, so making peace.

God has made the unity. God has made the peace. But we have to keep the unity in the bond of peace.

By keeping peace and being peacemakers, as Jesus said, we maintain unity. We have to have, however, peacemaking skills. Most people are not born with peacemaking skills.

There are, of course, different temperaments, and some people tend to seem more peacemaking. I mean, there are people right from childhood. Even a child is known by his deeds, it says in Proverbs, and early in life you can tell that some children are going

to be strong-willed and difficult, and other children seem to be easy and compliant.

And we might think of a compliant person who's temperamentally compliant as a better peacemaker. And in many respects, probably that person will be more of a peacemaker. However, being a peacemaker doesn't always mean that you just allow evil to go on without redressing it, without speaking up, without confronting it.

Jesus did that. He was a peacemaker, yet he confronted strongly evil, and he wanted peace, but he wanted a responsible peace. He said, don't think that I came to bring peace only, but also sword and division, so that a peacemaker like Christ isn't always just compliant and just never speaks up and never confronts evil.

There are times when the strong-willed person, in certain situations, will make the better peacemaker, because that person, not out of selfish willfulness, but out of just having backbone, will stand up and resist what would require the terms of an unjust or irresponsible kind of peace. You could have peace with everybody, presumably, if you just never spoke, and you never bothered anyone, and you just always complied and served everyone. And there are some people who would think that peacemaking involves this, but that's not necessarily the image of Christ that we have in the Bible.

Christ was a peacemaker, but he also confronted evil, and he had backbone, and he had sharp tongue at times, but only at the right times. Some people may flatter themselves that, like Jesus, they have a sharp tongue too, but they may not have it at the right times. If everything is done in love, then it's done the way Christ did it.

But our temperaments may incline us more or less toward being peacemakers, but whether we have a temperament that makes us seem more like a peacemaker or less like one, peacemaking is a skill to be learned. It says in Romans chapter 2, or chapter 3, of the heathen, that says, the way of peace they do not know. There is a way of peace, there's a path, a pattern of living, that leads to peace, and it's not known by some, and it needs to be learned.

And the teachings of Christ are largely teachings of the way of peace. And we need to maintain the peace and maintain unity. Now, realize that leaders of a church, when they discipline an unrepentant sinner in a church, have to be stern, but they are making peace.

They are maintaining unity. If sin is left unspoken against and undisciplined, it does not contribute to the unity of the church. It only causes confusion, grumbling, and division.

So maintaining unity in the bond of peace doesn't mean that you're just flabby and that you're just docile all the time. It does mean that in personal relationships, where it's your will versus another, you surrender yours. That is peacemaking.

You give up your will, you give up your preferences and defer to somebody else's. But

also, there needs to be strength in being a peacemaker, to be willing to stand up for the person who's right, and to face the person who's wrong, and to redress a situation where injustice is happening or sin. And so unity is a hard thing to maintain.

On the one hand, you have to know when to turn the other cheek. On the other, you have to sometimes know when to deliver someone over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. But all those things have to do with maintaining the unity of the church.

Now, the unity among Christians is a high priority to God, a very high priority. It says in Psalm 133, beginning with verse 1, Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil upon the head running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments.

It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion. For there, that is where brethren dwell together in unity, there the Lord commands the blessing, life forevermore. Now, brethren dwelling together in unity is a pleasing thing.

It's like the anointing oil coming down over the high priest, Aaron. It's like the dew on the hillside. It's the environment in which God commands blessing to come.

It's pleasing. Now, of course, when he says how good and pleasant it is, David may well be talking about to his own tastes. He likes it very much when people are in unity.

But it's clearly the case that this is God's attitude as well. God is pleased when his children are in unity. There's nothing more irritating to a parent than when his children bicker among themselves, and when they're petty, and when they don't get along with each other.

I believe that most parents, if they're wise, would rather have the child arguing with the parent than with another child, because the parent then is more directly involved and can, if wise, can handle the situation and do the discipline or whatever necessary, and there's only one party to deal with. But when it's two parties, it's so hard. I mean, as a parent, we see this all the time in our home.

Our children are good children, but they are children. They're little sinners, you know, like everybody else. And, you know, we'll hear, well, she took this from him and he had it first.

And you come in and you just don't know who did what or who's really more to blame. And it's both sides are guilty to some extent. And, you know, he pushed her, but she said, Caddy remarked him first.

And, and you just don't know, you know, what degree of responsibility to assign to which party. It's so much easier when you're in a conflict directly with the child than when the child, children are in conflict with each other. It's annoying.

It's unpleasant. It disturbs the peace of the household. And most parents, I think Godly parents are, find very little that is as distressing as children that are continually bickering and fighting with each other.

But when children love each other and defer to each other, nothing could delight a parent more. And God is apparently that way as well. God is delighted when his children grow together in unity.

In fact, there's only a few things in the Bible that the Bible says God hates. Seven of them are listed in Proverbs 6, Proverbs chapter six, verses 16 through 19. There it says, these six things the Lord hates.

Yes, seven are an abomination to him, a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift and running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. God hates one who sows discord among brethren. Proverbs 6, 19.

God says that unity is good and pleasant in the sight of God among brethren. Not world unity, not one world, you know, culture, society kind of thing, just like a political unity among all people, but actually unity among those who share in the life of God among himself. Those who are in his family, he wants them to be unified.

In John chapter 17, Jesus prayed for the disciples. He prayed mainly for a couple of things. One would be for them to be kept safe.

Another was that they'd be made holy or sanctified. And a third is that they would be unified. In John 17, verse 11, Jesus prayed for the disciples.

He says, now I'm no longer in the world, but these are in the world. And I come to you, Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me that they may be one as we are. And then further down in the same prayer, in verse 20, he says, I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they all may be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.

Then verse 23, I in them and you in me, that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me. Jesus indicated that when the Christians are one, perfectly one, perfectly in unity, that the world will then believe. The world will then know what? That God sent Jesus.

There's hardly anything the world needs to know more than that. And there's not very much likelihood they're going to learn it from us if the church continues to be ununified. Jesus said, I pray that they might be one, so the world would know.

Well, if the world doesn't know, then we can blame that at least in part on those who

interfere with the unity of the church, because its unity is what we are told by Christ will cause the world to be convinced. No wonder it's so important to Paul that we should endeavor, actually what endeavor means, give diligence to keep the unity of the spirit, the bond of peace. God has made us one.

We have to endeavor in our behavior to act that way and to maintain that sense and reality of being one. I should make clear so no one misunderstands me. When I think of unity, and I believe when God does, I don't think that means that Christians are required to all be equally close to each other.

There are obviously some people that you'll be more close to than others. There will be some people you agree with more than others. There will be some people whose temperaments click with yours more than others.

There are people who you find more enjoyable and other people more annoying than others. These things are not reflections of spiritual deficit at all. This is just the nature of the human condition.

Some people like one kind of food, some like another kind of food. Some like one kind of personality, some like another kind of personality. That's just not a moral issue.

The question of unity has to do with whether we treat each other as brothers or whether we prefer ourselves above others or whether we prefer our little group above those in another little group of Christians. The unity of the early Christians was seen in the fact that even though the Christians in Greece would most of them have never any personal contact with the Christians in Jerusalem, yet they were eager to help with the support of the congregation. They weren't of their culture.

They weren't even of their friends. They probably would never meet them. But they were aware of a need and that sense of oneness was such that, as Paul put it to the Corinthians, when one member suffers, all suffer.

When one member is exalted, all rejoice. That's the spirit of unity that should exist among all Christians. It does not exist as much as it should.

It, first of all, does not exist between groups of Christians, what we would call individual churches or denominations, although to some degree it does. There are certainly towns in which Baptist ministers work quite comfortably and with a great deal of love and cooperation with, say, Methodist ministers or Presbyterian ministers or some others. There is movement in that direction in some ways, at least for groups that are not of the same congregation or even the same denomination, to work more and more with each other.

This is a good thing, I believe. I don't think it's necessary for denominations to cease to exist so long as they cease to act like denominations. I think it's okay if there are, until

the Lord comes, Baptist churches and Presbyterian churches and Methodist churches, so long as they don't act like they're separate churches, so long as they act like one church.

There's every reason for that to be possible in many, many, many towns. Probably most towns these days, there is what you call a ministerial association where most of the pastors, at least the evangelicals, get together once a month to act like they have some unity. Typically, this is just a symbolic thing, though at times they make plans to work cooperatively on some outreach or something like that.

This is not a deep unity, but it's a move in the right direction. Real unity comes, or is maintained, or is seen in the individual relationships of each Christian to each other Christian. The unwillingness to entertain gossip about another Christian who's not present.

The concern over the needs of a Christian of whom you know, but who is not necessarily a close associate or friend. The sense that you are part of an organism, and every other Christian is part of that same organism, and their welfare is your welfare, and their suffering is your suffering, and to a certain extent, even their sin is your sin. Not fully, but we know Daniel and other intercessors in the Bible often identified so much with the people they were praying for that they named themselves among the group of sinners.

You know, we have done this and we have done that, Daniel said, when in fact Daniel had not done any of the things that he was confessing. But there's just this sense of solidarity, this sense of oneness. If the Christians are persecuted in one country, Americans should bear, Christian Americans, should bear the burden of that on their hearts and in their prayers and be doing things, perhaps whatever God puts on their heart or makes possible to do, to try to alleviate or to assist Christians in worse conditions.

All of that just springs out of the sense of being one, one body. But Paul is not here talking principally about the need for us to fill one body with Christians on the other side of the world, although that too is part of the picture. He's concerned more about the way we behave toward those Christians with whom we have contact, in maintaining a peace between us, keeping unity in the bond of peace.

Now, he realizes that among Christians there are all kinds of temperaments. There are different races who have raised in various cultures. And there are people with different preferences and different emphases and so forth.

And it's these very things that often have led to division among Christians, or at least among humanity, and often among Christians as well. Humanity divides itself up over things like gender or race or political party or which football team they're fans of or social status. And people divide and sometimes won't associate.

They don't consider themselves one with people in other groups of this kind. And Christians come out of all those groups and sometimes come with those same attitudes when they come to Christ. And Paul realizes that unity and peace and the sense of oneness among these people is not going to be natural unless the focus is shifted from those things which make us different from each other to those things which are overriding issues that make us the same as each other.

There will always be differences among us. And Paul says that in 1 Corinthians 12, the body has different members. And they're all different from each other.

And it's the difference that actually makes them useful to each other. The hand cannot say to the eye, I have no need of you. The head can't say to the foot, I have no need of you.

We all need each other because we all have differences from each other that are, those define the areas where a weakness on my part is made up for by a strength on yours. And so we shouldn't hope for differences to vanish. Learn to appreciate the variety.

But don't define yourself or others in terms of these differences. Men and women are different from each other, temperamentally to a large extent. This causes a lot of strife in relations between men and women.

A lot of marriages have trouble because of this, because men think differently than women think, and emote differently than women emote. And sometimes women think that men should be like them, and men think that women should be like them, and they aren't. Now men and women are both equally required to be godly, and to be spiritual, and to be obedient to God.

But they're not, women are not required to become men, and men are not required to become women. And in order for men and women to get along, in marriage for example, it's necessary for both to respect the variety, and even possible for the team working together to do more things, to cover more ground, and to accomplish more. So in the church we need to recognize that differences in somebody's perspective, or personality, or temperament, might initially seem annoying to you.

It might be the very kind of thing that would keep you from really being close to that person if you weren't both in Christ. But really the thing that is different about them makes them fit a niche that you wouldn't fit well. And there are many niches to fill in the body of Christ, there are different members.

But we don't divide and define ourselves by these differences. We are defined, our unity is defined by what we have in common, and that's what Paul goes into in verses four through six. Whatever differences may exist that might contribute to disunity, or at least to diversity, there are a number of things, and they are the important things to the

Christian, that all Christians have in common.

And so Paul makes his appeal to the Christians to be one on the basis of these shared things. In verse four he says, there's 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. Now if the same God is above us all, then we're about equal under him.

If he is through us all, and in us all, then we're joined into oneness by him. We all share the same, worship the same God. And there are all these other things too.

There's one body, the church is not many bodies, it is one body. There are over 4,000 Protestant denominations in the United States, but there's one body of Christ. That makes it clear how much folly it is to think of the body of Christ in terms of some local congregation, even some network, some denomination.

It's not the body of Christ, there's only one body of Christ. And all persons who are in Christ are in that body, and it doesn't really matter whether they go to church or whether they go to any of those churches. I mean, there may be advantages in going to church.

There certainly may be something to be said in favor of going to one church as opposed to a different church because of quality of whatever is happening there. I'm not saying it makes no difference where you go to church or whether you go to church. I'm saying that when it comes to being in the body of Christ, it makes no difference where you go to church or whether you go to church.

You're in the body of Christ by being in the body of Christ. Going to church is a separate issue and may be done here or there or another place based upon various sense needs or whatever. You see, when a church calls themselves Mennonites and meets them in one place, another church calls themselves Presbyterian and meets them in another place, the perception of people in the church all too often is that there are two churches here.

There's the Mennonite body and there's the Presbyterian body. Then over there, there's the Baptist body and you've got the Assembly of God body over here and the Forswear body and these other independent church bodies. But to God, there's only one body, and to act otherwise is to act against God, is to act in rebellion against the unity, and is to fail to keep the unity.

The body of Christ is one and he says, and there's only one spirit. Now, since all Christians share in the Holy Spirit and that spirit is one, we're all, as it were, in him. We are all one in the spirit.

Just as you were called in one hope of your calling, all Christians have the same hope. We don't have the same activities that we're in right now. We don't even have the same

short-term goals for our families and for our careers and things as each other.

Everyone's on his own trip in that respect, but we all have one ultimate goal, one ultimate hope. When it's all done, the things that matter so much to me to accomplish for my family or my career or my ministry or my whatever, and the corresponding concerns that you have in your life, those things will be nothing, because we'll all be in the one thing that we all hope for, and that is to be like Jesus, to eternally be found in him, and that is our hope, the hope of glory. The many little details of life and short-term goals and so forth sometimes take us in different directions from each other now, but ultimately we all have the same hope.

We have one Lord. Now, when he says we have one Lord, you have to realize that in the early church, the rudimentary confession that made a person a Christian was the confession, Jesus is Lord. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12, no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit of God, and if a person said Jesus is Lord, they made the basic confession that declared them to be Christian, and when he said we have one Lord, at one level he could be saying, listen, we've all made the same confession.

None of us have said Buddha is Lord. We've all said the same thing, Jesus is Lord, but more importantly, to say we all have one Lord means we're all following the same master, and so much division occurs and criticism and hostility occurs in the body of Christ over this very point, that we think that somebody isn't following the same master we are. We think that someone isn't following Jesus well enough, and yet in talking about that very problem in Romans chapter 14, there was in fact division in the Roman church.

It would appear that it was largely between the Jewish and the Gentile elements in the church. Here's how Paul addressed it in Romans chapter 14. He says in verse 2, one believes that he may eat all things, that would probably be the Gentiles in the church, but he who is weak eats only vegetables, probably the Jews who had trouble finding kosher food in the meat market, so they avoided eating meat altogether.

Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat. Let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Now, people judging and despising each other over this would be why? Because one thinks the other is not doing the right thing.

One thinks the other is not obeying the Lord. The one who thinks that you shouldn't eat kosher merely despises those who do eat kosher. They figure they're not following Jesus.

Jesus said all foods are clean. But the ones who think that kosher food is necessary to eat, they judge the other person and say, well, he's not following Jesus properly. But Paul says in verse 4, who are you to judge another's servant? To his own Lord, his own master, he stands or he falls.

So, if we all have the same Lord, then we have to allow that some people are following

the Lord and going, maybe in some respects, a different direction, have a different emphasis, different passion, than we have. Now, it's obvious that some people who profess to be Christians aren't following the Lord at all. It's easy to tell when Jesus has said something and people are ignoring it altogether.

But all true Christians are seeking to follow Jesus. And whatever else we may differ on, the fact that we're all following the same Lord is in itself enough to unify us, or to be sympathetic with each other and to try to work together. We have one faith, he said, and by that he probably means the Christian faith, unless he means faith in a different sense.

You know, there's, the word faith is used two different ways in the Bible. One is simply of the act of believing. The other is a reference to the faith, meaning the religious truth of Christianity.

To depart from the faith is to depart from the truth of Christianity. Keep the faith doesn't just mean keep believing. It means keep true to the doctrines of Christianity.

Contend for the faith once delivered, Jude said. The faith can just mean Christianity, or the body of truth that is part of Christianity. But also, faith can just mean the act of believing.

It's not clear how Paul means it here. If he means the act of believing, he says we have one faith, he probably would be saying we're all saved by the same means, namely by faith. But it's to my mind likely that he means the one, we have the same basic doctrines, the same basic creed.

We all believe the basic Christian truth, the faith. And we have one baptism. What he means by this is we've all been baptized into Christ.

We were not baptized, some in the name of Paul and some in the name of Apollos and some in the name of Cephas, as Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, who were divided also, and he was making his appeal there also for unity, concerned about divisions he'd heard of. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 he said, for it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ.

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I am baptized in my own name. Now if people begin to divide and say, well I'm of Paul, or I'm of Cephas, or I'm of Apollos, Paul's saying you're implying then that you were baptized in the name of Paul, or baptized in the name of Cephas, or baptized in the name of Apollos, which is ridiculous. You were not.

You were all baptized the same. You were all baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. You all

have the same baptism, which is an argument for unity.

I may have told you before that I was fairly naive 15 years ago when I started this school. It was the first time I headed up a para-church organization that was trying to interact with the churches in town. We called all the pastors abandoned together when we first came there and set up our school.

I wanted to introduce ourselves to them. I made it clear to them, we're not planning to start a church here. We're not going to compete with them for members.

We're just going to have a school. We will have a Friday night meeting, but there won't be any offerings taken. There won't be any membership.

It won't be called a church. The people who come to it will in no way be drawn away from your Sunday meeting, from their membership in your church, and so forth. I made it very clear that we don't intend to be a church or distract from what they're doing.

In the course of the years, we actually converted a lot of people, people who weren't in any of the churches in town. They got converted. We would always encourage them to go to church somewhere.

They ended up in various churches. There was a time when we were baptizing some people in the lake that was on our property. There were a lot of people standing around in the sand dunes watching and so forth.

After we baptized the people we were baptizing, I asked if anyone else wanted to be baptized, as we typically did. Because we're in the water, we might as well baptize anyone else who wants to be baptized before we get out and get dry. There was a lady there who we had led to the Lord.

We had brought her to Jesus. She was a New Age pagan in town. She was evangelized by us.

We had sent her to a church, and she started going to this church in town. But she had not been baptized. She was there watching the baptism.

I said to her, Terry, would you like to be baptized? You haven't been baptized yet, have you? It was an unusual thing that we would lead someone to the Lord and they hadn't been baptized. We always took them out and baptized them as soon as we got them to confess Christ. We had talked to her and she had gone home and made a commitment to Christ.

It just had never happened that she came back to be baptized. So I asked her, Terry, would you like to be baptized? She said, no, I'm going to be baptized at my church. I said, okay, that's fine.

I said nothing more about it. Later, months later, I found out her pastor was offended because I had asked if she wanted to be baptized by us. He said, I thought you said you weren't a church.

I thought you said you weren't going to compete with the churches. In our church, we like to baptize our own people. It's just kind of a family thing.

We like all the people in our church like to participate in the baptism of our members and so forth. I said, well, I had no idea that I was in competition with you. I didn't know the pastor thought this way.

I learned it, but I didn't know it then. I always thought as people get baptized into Christ, they don't get baptized into this church or into that church or into some other church. They get baptized into Jesus Christ.

That's what the Bible teaches, and I believe that's true. But, and because of that, it never occurred to me that it should matter to me or anyone else who baptized somebody. If I had a church and somebody baptized one of my members, I can't imagine being upset about that because they're not baptized into my church.

They're baptized into Jesus. And this is not well understood by some. You're not baptized into the Baptist church or you're not baptized into the four square church.

You're baptized into Christ. There's one baptism. You don't go to a Baptist church baptism and hear them say, we baptize you in the name of the Baptist denomination.

And go to an Assembly of God church and hear them say, we baptize you in the name of the Assembly of God. That'd be like baptizing in Paul's name or Paul's name or Cephas' name. Paul says, no, we're all baptized with one baptism.

And here he is, of course, referring to water baptism. It should not be thought, however, that by this statement, we can rule out other baptisms in addition to water baptism. There are some who are very concerned to disprove the Pentecostal contention.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit is a second work of grace or it is a separate phenomenon to conversion. You know that Charismatics and Pentecostals generally believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an additional phenomenon, an additional experience, additional to conversion. And so you get baptized in water when you're converted, but later maybe you might get baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Well, there are many who do not believe this and they feel that there's only one time when everything happens. You get saved and you get baptized in the Holy Spirit all at once. And to prove this point, sometimes they appeal to Paul here, saying there is one baptism.

Now, if water baptism is baptism, then there's no other baptism because there's only one baptism, they say, and therefore there is no baptism in the Holy Spirit additional. But this is taking Paul other than what he prefers to be understood as, because Paul himself believed in people being baptized in the Holy Spirit after their conversion. We see Paul ministering that way.

In fact, he himself was converted and baptized in the Holy Spirit on different occasions. But what he's saying here is not that there's only one baptism that you are allowed to have. That is, you have water baptism, but you're not allowed to have baptism in the Holy Spirit as well or some other baptism.

There are many baptisms. There's baptism in suffering. There's baptism in fire.

There's different things that are called baptisms in the Bible. But what Paul is saying, that in terms of water baptism, an experience that all Christians share, they all had the same one. That is in Christ, not in certain leaders and denominations.

And there's one God who's the Father of all. And if He's the Father of all, then we're all of the same family, obviously. And that's what he's saying, who is above us all, through us all, and in you all.

But, verse 7, to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now, what he's saying there is that even though we have all these things in common, we do differ from one another in terms of gifting. Diversity is not the same thing as disunity.

It's very important to know that. Diversity is not disunity. And the flip side of that, of course, is that unity does not mean uniformity.

We can have unity without uniformity. We can have different gifts and yet be one body. The members of your body, each of them are different from the other members of the same body, but they're part of the same body.

And that's the point. So, to each of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. Each person has a different gift, a different grace given.

Therefore, he says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. This is a quote from Psalm 68, and it is a peculiar quote. It's actually, in some ways, we could say a misquote, though Paul certainly was aware of the correct way to quote it.

He knew the scriptures well enough. But it's not an exact quote, I guess we'd have to say. In Psalm 68, in verse 18, in the context of God having conquered his enemies, it says, you have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive.

Then it says, you have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the

Lord God might dwell there. Now, when it says you have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious, it apparently means that God, as the great conqueror, has conquered even those who rebelled against him and has received gifts that they pay tribute to him. A king who conquered other kings would receive tribute from them on an ongoing basis.

And it's describing God in his victory over his enemies in those terms, that he has ascended above his enemies and conquered them and led them captive and received tribute from them, received gifts among men, even among those rebels who had turned against him. Now, the difference is that Paul quotes it sort of the same. He says, first of all, Paul changes the you to he.

So, we can see Paul's not exactly quoting, because he says you ascended on high, you led captivity captive. But Paul quotes it, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive. And where the Psalm says, you have received gifts among men, Paul quotes it, he gave gifts to men.

Now, obviously, Paul is following generally the form of that Psalm, Psalm 68, 18. But it's also obvious he's not quoting it exactly. Some scholars feel that he may be quoting a hymn of the early church that was based on that Psalm, or he may be originating it as a paraphrase of that Psalm.

He is certainly not quoting the Psalm exactly. But the point is that when God in the Psalm conquered his enemies, his enemies, you know, surrendered to him, he led them captive, and he received gifts from them, which were a token of their having been conquered. Now, what Paul is pointing out is not only did he receive gifts from men, but Jesus has given gifts back to men.

He's given gifts to the church. He has ascended into heaven. This statement, he led captivity captive, it's not clear exactly how this is meant.

It could mean that the hosts of hell that he conquered, the demonic powers, the principalities and powers, which he disarmed, we're told that in Colossians 2, 15, that he disarmed principalities and powers on the cross, that he has, as it were, taken them captive in his triumphal train back into heaven. It is also possible that we are his captives, that we are the ones in whom he rides in triumph. Paul himself would be an example of one of God's former enemies who has been conquered and is now his captive, the prisoner of the Lord, as he calls himself.

In chapter 4, verse 1, and in chapter 3, verse 1, if he calls himself the prisoner of the Lord, he may well think of himself as one of these captives that Christ has taken. And, in fact, Paul is one of those gifts that Christ has given to men, because the gifts that he refers to here are not what we usually think of as the gifts of the Spirit. Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit elsewhere, in Romans 12 and in 1 Corinthians 12, where he lists

certain abilities as gifts, the ability of prophesying, or healing, or doing miracles, or discerning spirits, or teaching, or ruling, or serving, or giving.

These are gifts that Paul lists in those two places, Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. But here, when he talks about gifts, he's going to list a different kind of gifts, and we don't see them listed until verse 11, because there's a parenthesis in verses 9 and 10 that we have to get through first. But when he begins to list the gifts that he has in mind, they are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

Now, apostles are not an ability. Apostles are people. Prophets are not an ability.

They are people. Pastors, and teachers, and evangelists are not an ability. They are people that have ability, but he's not talking about the gifts in terms of being the abilities, but the people who have them.

The gifts that Christ has given to the church as a result of ascension are people, gifted people, among them apostles. Now, Paul is one of those. And we'll talk more about these gifted ones in verse 11 when we get to it, but I want to talk about verses 9 and 10 first.

He says, Now this he ascended, now he's alluding to what he's just said in verse 8, that Christ ascended on high. He says, Now this he ascended, what does it mean? But that he also first descended to 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.

Now, what does it mean that Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth? I would need to point out first of all that in verse 9 when it says, but that he also first descended. Do you notice the word first before the word descended? That word first is not found in the more ancient manuscripts. So that some would read it, now this he ascended, what does it mean? But that he descended, also descended.

Now, if the word first is not there, it may be that the descent that is referred to is subsequent to the ascension that has happened afterwards at Pentecost. He is talking about gifts, and that is where the gifts were given at Pentecost. It's possible that he is saying, Jesus, this one who ascended, also descended again after ascending in the person of the Holy Spirit.

He came down at Pentecost and gave gifts to men. That is one way of understanding it. Although commentators seem to prefer the inclusion of the word first, that before he ascended he had first descended.

So, the meaning could be entirely different depending on the inclusion or exclusion of the word first there, and some manuscripts have it and some don't. Now, let's take the assumption that that word belongs there. Jesus ascended.

Now, Paul says, well, you got to realize that in order for Jesus to ascend, he has to first

come down, because if he didn't come down, there would be no word for him to ascend to. He's already, before he came to earth, before his descent, he was as high as high can be. There'd be nowhere to ascend to from where he was originally.

So, in order to even speak of him ascending, we must presuppose that he first came down so that he'd have a place from which to ascend. Now, the question that presents itself is what is meant to the lower parts of the earth. He descended to the lower parts of the earth.

There are many who would tie this in with some verses in 1 Peter, especially 1 Peter 3.19, that talks about Jesus by the spirit went and preached to the spirits in prison. And the meaning of the verses in Peter are very elusive, very hard to know what he means in the passage, but there is the view that Jesus, when he died, went down to Hades and preached to the souls down there in Hades. There are different versions of this theory.

The Bible doesn't say it is so, unless it says it in these obscure verses, which, let me put it this way, each of the verses, there are two or three verses that perhaps could incline us to this view, but each of the verses taken individually is capable of being understood differently than that, so that there's no solid teaching about this business of Jesus going down and preaching to the souls in Hades. There is a possibility that 1 Peter 3.19 might be saying that, but it might be saying something else. It's also possible that this is saying something like that, that Jesus went down to Hades, but that's not the only way to understand this, possibly.

The lower parts of the earth could simply mean he came down from heaven to the lowest levels of earthly life. He existed at the highest position in heaven, under his father, of course, in the form of God, but he came down. He didn't just come down to earth, he came down to the lowest position on earth.

He made himself the form of a servant, even a condemned criminal, crucified. He came so low as that, lower than many men on earth go. He didn't just come down to earth, he came down to the lowest station on earth, being born poor, being born in an obscure place, living his life in obscurity for the most part, and as a servant to all.

This is a low position he took. Same thing that Paul said in Philippians, that because he lowered himself so far in the form of a servant, and humbled himself even unto the death of the cross, therefore God highly exalted him. Well, Paul might be saying that here, that Jesus, because he simply came down to such a low position, he has now ascended to the highest position.

And because he's been at the lowest and the highest, he's been everywhere in between, therefore there's no place that he hasn't been. So he fills all things, that he fills all positions. If you are on a mountaintop experience, he is there.

If you're feeling down deep in a low valley in trial, he's there too. He's been at the highest point, higher than you'll be. And at the lowest point, lower than you'll ever be.

And everything in between. That may be his meaning. It may have nothing to do with Hades.

There's no reason to believe that Hades would be regarded as the lower parts of the earth, though it might be. Now, on the other supposition, that the word first is not original in the verse 9, but that he ascended, what does this mean, but that he also descended, would be saying that after Jesus ascended, he also descended. He came down to the lowly.

The lower parts of the earth could mean us. There are not many noble, not many great are called. Christians are largely lower classes, typically were in the first century.

And that he descended down in the form of the spirit to inhabit the lowly. Remember when it says in Isaiah 66, one and two, God says, what temple will you build for me? He says, I will look to this man. He was meek, who is crushed in spirit, who trembles at my word.

Consider, I think I can find this verse quickly. Isaiah chapter 57 and verse 15, Isaiah 57 and verse 15. For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. God dwells in the high and holy place, but he also dwells with the lowly, the one who has a contrite and humble spirit. He fills all things.

He ascended high, but he descended low to inhabit the humble, the lowly ones. He came down to the lower parts of earthly society to inhabit and fill all things. Now, I don't know which is to be understood, but one says he fills all things in verse 10.

It may be similar to verse 6, where it says God fills us all. He is in us all and through us all. And so it may be people.

It may be talking about filling lowly people. There's really no way to determine this without knowing the original reading of verse 9, whether the word first belongs there or not. Some manuscripts have it, some don't.

And the inclusion of the word first tells us whether the descent is his descent in the incarnation or whether it is his descent at Pentecost. It's not altogether important for us to decide this question because this is a parenthesis to set aside for Paul. His real point continues in verse 11.

After having said in verse 8 that Christ gave gifts to men, he now in verse 11 tells us what some of those gifts were that he gave. He himself gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 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 by which they lie in wait to deceive. But speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effect of working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Now this is a long train of thought here. I don't know if there were any periods in all those verses. I didn't notice any, but if there were, it's still one thought.

I think it's just one long sentence. Now the sentence begins by talking about the gifts that God gave the church, and here again he's not talking about abilities. He's talking about offices.

He's talking about leaders. He's talking about the people who minister to the body corporately. Now this is not an exhaustive list of gifts.

It's just some samples. He doesn't even mention deacons, for example. He doesn't mention perhaps some of the other categories that one could mention.

But he mentions apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. Now these five are often spoken of today by certain persons as the five-fold ministry, and act as if God has somehow got five officers or five offices which comprise the leadership of the church. But Paul doesn't tell us this is all the officers he could name.

He only lists five here, just like in 1 Corinthians 12 he lists only nine gifts, but in Romans 12 he lists six more. None of the lists of the gifts are comprehensive, and it's not necessary for us to assume that five is the total number of church leaders that Paul would be able to name. He just wants to make a point.

The point is that God gave leaders to the church. For example, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are there for the purpose of building up the church.

Now Paul uses two metaphors in this section. One is of course the metaphor of the church as a body, and one is the metaphor of the church as a building, being built up, being assembled, being constructed. That's what edified means.

The word edified means built up. The English word edifice means a building, which

obviously has the same root as the verb edified. Now the apostles and prophets are persons that we read of, especially the apostles we read of a great deal in the New Testament.

Prophets we read of more often in the Old. And we read earlier in chapter 2, verse 20, that the church has been built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. He also said in chapter 3, in verse 5, that there was a mystery which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, but has now been revealed by the spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.

Notice apostles and prophets are linked closely in Paul's thought here. The apostles and prophets are the ones to whom the mystery has now been made clear. The apostles and prophets are the ones who are the foundation, or at least have laid the foundation, for the church.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, apostles and prophets are also linked and they're at the top of the list of church officers, as it were. In 1 Corinthians 12, verse 28, God has appointed these in the church. First, apostles.

Second, prophets. Now notice he says third, teachers. After that, miracles.

Then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have the gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? Now notice apostles and prophets are said to be first and second in the church. Teachers third.

Now when Paul lists these so-called five-fold ministry in Ephesians, he puts teachers down near the bottom of the five. He doesn't put teachers third, he puts evangelists in the third position, which gives us reason to believe that neither list is comprehensive. There are different, I mean, Paul specifically says third, teachers in 1 Corinthians 12, he doesn't list the order of priority necessarily in Ephesians.

Of course, apostles and prophets stand at the top, but then you've got other guys, including evangelists, pastors, teachers, and who knows what else, maybe deacons and others. But those are not necessarily listed in order of their importance. What we can say is that apostles and prophets stand out as a category unto themselves.

If we would suggest that apostles and prophets are officers that belong to the first century principally, and perhaps that there are none of them today, there would be some who would say, well, how can you do that? Because Paul mentioned evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the same breath. How could there be any argument made that there are still evangelists, pastors, and teachers, which we all acknowledge, but that there are not apostles and prophets anymore? And actually I used this argument for a long time when I was arguing that there were still apostles and prophets. But my consideration over the

years of how Paul speaks about apostles and prophets has given me the impression that he saw apostles and prophets as a special kind of gifting, which were there for the foundation work of the church.

They are the church built on the foundation. They were there for whom these mysteries had to be revealed. And they have been, and they're recorded in the scripture.

Unless we need some more scripture written, we may not need any more apostles and prophets. You see, the Old Testament was written largely by prophets and the New Testament by apostles. And therefore, the foundation of the apostles and prophets has been preserved for us there.

Now, this does not mean necessarily that I don't believe in the gift of prophecy. I do believe in the gift of prophecy. But I don't believe everyone who has the gift of prophecy is a prophet.

I don't believe that everyone who can teach is a teacher. I don't believe that everybody who plants churches is an apostle. Paul said, are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers? No, they're not.

But all might prophesy and all might teach, but they're not all prophets and they're not all teachers. There's a difference between prophesying and being a prophet. And I don't know that there is any evidence in scripture that the office of a prophet or the office of apostle is needed or did continue beyond the days of the apostles.

You do find in the Didache, which was written right around the turn of the first century, reference to prophets coming and how churches should treat the prophets who come. So there were still at the end of the first century, some who were regarded as prophets, but you don't read much of them after very far into the church age. There is some reason to believe that having that office was necessary at a time when the church had to be established.

And that's what a foundation is for, but you don't have to lay the foundation over and over and over again. If the building is standing on the original foundation and the foundation that was laid is a firm foundation. And so I'm personally of the opinion that apostles and prophets are in a category by themselves, different from evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

A foundation was laid by apostles and prophets and the evangelists, pastors, and teachers build on that foundation. They add, the evangelists add new stones, new living stones by converting people. The pastors and the teachers shape those stones.

They disciple them and assemble them, but they all do it on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. And that is my understanding. I know most charismatics would disagree with me on that.

Now it says that these gifts are given for a particular purpose. This purpose is expanded on over a period of about five verses, verses 12 through 16. Rather than get into it a little bit and then having to end in two minutes when the tape runs out, I think I'll break here and talk about that purpose when we come back.

And I won't try to get into it and then have to break. That'd be frustrating to me. So we'll stop at this point.

And then when we come back, we will see what the purpose of these ministries is.