

Gifts Toward Full Maturity

Thomas Robinson, *Ephesians – Growing Up Into Christ 15*, June 30, 2013

Ephesians 4:7-16

⁷ But **grace** was **given** to **each one of us** according to the measure of **the Messiah's gift**.
⁸ Therefore it says,

*“When **he ascended** on high he made captivity a captive;
he **gave gifts** to the people.”* [Psalm 68:18]

⁹ In saying, “*He ascended*,” what does it mean but that he had also **descended** into the lower things of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is himself the one who also **ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things**.

¹¹ **He himself also gave** the **apostles**, the **prophets**, the **evangelists**, the **shepherds** and **teachers**,
¹² **to equip the saints for the work of ministry,**
for **building up the body of the Messiah**,

¹³ **until we all** attain to the **unity of the faith** and of the **knowledge of the Son of God**,
to a **mature adult**, to a measure of stature of **the fullness of the Messiah**,

¹⁴ **in order that** we may **no longer be children**, tossed to and fro by the **waves**
and **blown** about by every wind of **teaching**,
by people's trickery, by craftiness leading to schemes of deception,

¹⁵ **but that**, by **practicing the truth in love**, we may **grow up** in every way
into him who is **the head**, the **Messiah**,

¹⁶ **from whom the whole body**
(carefully **joined** together and **held** together by every **ligament** of support
when **each one** of the parts is **working as it should**)
creates the body's growth for building itself up **in love**.

Ephesians 1:22-23

²² And he (God) has put all things under his (Jesus') feet and has made him **head** over all things
for the church, ²³ which is **his body**, the **fullness of him who fills all in all**.

Ephesians 2:19-22

¹⁹ ... You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of **the household of God**, ²⁰ built on
the foundation of the **apostles and prophets**, Messiah **Jesus** himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in
whom the **whole structure**, being **joined together**, grows into a **holy temple in the Lord**. ²² **In**
him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God by the Spirit**.

Colossians 2:19 (cf. Col. 1:18)

¹⁹ ... the **Head** (Jesus), from whom the **whole body**, nourished and knit together through its
ligaments and sinews, **grows the growth of God**.

I Corinthians 3:21-23

²¹ ... For **all things are yours**, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (Peter) or the world or life
or death or the present or the future – all are yours, ²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

I Corinthians 12:12

¹² For just as **the body is one** and has **many members**, and all the members of the body, though
many, are one body, **so it is with Christ**.

Gifts of Grace for a Purpose

Throughout Ephesians, one of Paul's most basic themes is God's grace and generosity. He wants us to learn to see what our lives, church, world can be when we open ourselves to God's amazing love and grace. We refuse, ignore it and make our lives smaller, duller. God intends his gifts to be creative, transforming, purposeful. Paul unfurls here a vision of that creative grace given to each one of us in Jesus –the gospel, new life, Holy Spirit. In it we share in God's work in the past (Ps. 68) and in Christ's filling/uniting his whole creation. Then one elaborate sentence (vv 11-16) Paul unfolds the multifaceted purpose of Jesus' gifts seen in the leaders of the church. Paul interweaves metaphors of equipping, building, and especially growing to maturity. Running all through is a focus on "each one" and "we all." Each verse describes purposes – interrelated, building on each other, aiming at full maturity.

12. Equip saints for work of service. This is fundamental, building up the Messiah's body.
13. The goal is a unity of shared trust in what Jesus has done, real maturity focused in him.
14. Anything else leaves us immature, ungrounded, easy victims of distorted religion.
15. We are an unusual body that grows up to a maturity that our head, Jesus, already has.
16. By his presence in every part, he gives the whole body power to grow itself in love.

The Need for Apostles, Prophets, ... Teachers

Paul starts by highlighting the roles of the founding and sustaining leaders of the communities: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers: all have varied and important roles. Apostles – witnesses of the resurrection, church founders. Prophets – speaking God's word for exhortation and guidance. Evangelists – announcing the good news. Shepherds – caring for others spiritually (Elders and others). Teachers – communicating the whole range of scripture and the story of Jesus depending on the need. All are Jesus' gifts to his people. Paul was all of these. But he had seen the strong human tendency to emphasize leaders as the heart of the church (as in Corinth –"I belong to Paul...Apollon"). Paul highly values his ministry but knows it is meaningless unless Jesus and his Cross are truly proclaimed. Paul includes himself among the "we all" of the saints. As an apostles he has a responsibility to equip others for work of ministry/service. As one of "we all" he needs to minister also. The life of ministry/service is for every individual because it flows from the life of Jesus himself.

Growing the Right Way

Full Christian growth is keyed to who we are as creatures of a God who knows our lives fully. It begins and ends with Jesus—who calls us and shows us the maturity of God's life of love. It fits "each one" individually with gifts of grace, so that each person is a distinct creature. It provides the "we all" of the "whole body" that grows together with mutual support. It calls us individually and together to the highest goal – adulthood, Christ's fullness. Each person is called to active participation, in their own distinct way. But this individuality is not selfishness; rather each discovers gifts given for the good of the body and the world. I realize I am a steward of abilities and opportunities that help me and can help others. The great challenge and opportunity is fitting together, loving, supporting each other. Paul speaks of joints, ligaments, every part working. Then from Christ' vitality and nourishment, the whole body creates the body's growth, building itself up in love.