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Author’s Preface

With the completion of this commentary, my long-term relationship with Ephesians passed its silver anniversary. It began as the tiny seed of an idea in the same year I was joined in marriage to my dear Sara, with whom I recently celebrated a much more significant jubilee! As I was searching for a topic for my upcoming M.Div. treatise, my vicarage supervisor, James Fandrey, pointed me to an intriguing article in the *Concordia Journal*: Henry Hamann’s “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12—A Necessary Revision” (1988). This erudite investigation of how and why “the work of (the?) ministry” (Eph 4:12) had become detached from the *office* of the ministry in modern translations of the verse wedded my exegetical interest with a growing desire to investigate the biblical roots of the pastoral office. It resulted in a treatise whose subtitle, “The Question of a Comma,” has been the occasion of much friendly teasing over the years.

Nearly a decade later, then general editor of the Concordia Commentary series, Jonathan Grothe, who was part of the body of Christ where the Lord had put me as pastor, proposed that I take on Ephesians. By that time I had developed some thoughts on the baptismal character of the letter, though I protested that a commentary should be written at the end of one’s exegetical career, not the beginning. Whether through sloth, distraction, or diligence, my seventeen years of labor on the project have brought that prophecy to fulfillment—though one prays this is more the middle than the end of said career.

As teaching is the best path to learning, any credit for insight into this “crown of Paulinism” must be shared with my students at Westfield House, Cambridge, in the seven consecutive years that I led a seminar there on Ephesians. Many an idea fleshed out in these pages began in notes hastily scribbled while young men and women expressed surprisingly mature insights. Though three students returning from the pub may claim to have saved the manuscript by frightening a would-be thief from my study window, the reality is that there was little yet to steal! Turning notes and ideas into readable text happened chiefly in a concentrated half-year sabbatical, thanks to the generosity of Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, Ontario, and Concordia Publishing House.

At an evening social in Cambridge, a chaplain from St. John’s College (to whom the host had introduced me so we could “talk theology”) expressed his wonder that yet another commentary on Ephesians was warranted. At the time the best answer I could muster was that a Lutheran perspective ought to be distinctive enough to be welcomed into the mix of modern studies. Since that time

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I have pondered the question and venture the following as distinctive features of this commentary.

Firstly, in contrast to both critical commentaries that deny Pauline authorship and conservative volumes that treat the letter as a general epistle or circular, this commentary argues that two isagogical factors are simultaneously true: the apostle Paul wrote Ephesians to the Christian community in the city of Ephesus. This means, on the one hand, that the record of Acts and Paul’s other letters may be used to construct a picture of the historical and ecclesiastical situation addressed by the letter. On the other hand, it also means that both the narrow higher critical and the narrow conservative Protestant pictures of who Paul was and what he could have written need thorough examination and revision—a task taken up in this commentary’s admittedly lengthy introduction. This commentary allows the letter to tell us who Paul is and what he thought, rather than critiquing the letter on the basis of a narrow preconception of the so-called “authentic Paul.”

Secondly, by anchoring the letter in Paul’s ministry (both in Ephesus and later in his arrest and imprisonment), this commentary discerns a number of important themes. Baptism, though mentioned by name only once (Eph 4:5), undergirds and permeates the entire letter, with its concern for the unity of the church in Christ and its depiction of the church as his body. Paul’s lengthy ministry in Ephesus both explains and leads to the discernment of a liturgical and sacramental flavor to a letter written to a church where the apostle had baptized, preached, prayed, and presided at the Lord’s Supper. Paul’s farewell sermon to the Ephesian presbyters assembled in Miletus (Acts 20:15–38) coheres with his explication of the office of the ministry in Ephesians 3–4. And the rather one-sided conflict between the triumphant Gospel of Christ and the polytheistic pagan culture of Ephesus, home of the magnificent temple of the goddess Artemis, provides background to the letter’s emphasis on spiritual warfare and the opposition between idolatry and true worship.

Thirdly, flowing from my doctoral research into the oral character of Paul’s epistles, this commentary pays close attention to the letter as an act of proclamation of Law and Gospel within the context of the Christian Divine Service. Orality theory suggests both microscopic and macroscopic techniques and observations. Its fruits are harvested in the interpretation of phrases, clauses, and larger units that include repetition, lists, and various patterns, for example. But the commentary also draws upon rhetorical analysis to uncover Paul’s strategies of argumentation and persuasion. Put in churchly terms, it seeks to discern the Christian rhetoric that characterizes the letter as sermon. This is an eminently practical endeavor, for the goal of Christian commentary is to facilitate the proclamation of God’s Holy Word.

In contrast to many modern commentaries, the present volume is therefore somewhat thin in its reliance on and citation of secondary literature (modern academic studies)—though thick and weighty in the hand! Modeling the classical pattern of sermon preparation, it focuses on careful grammatical analysis...
of the text within the context of Holy Scripture and in light of classical history and culture. Lexicons, grammars, and concordances (including complex and exhaustive BibleWorks computer searches) have been the primary tools. The exegetical results were then matured in the barrel of patristic interpretation, the Lutheran confessional writings, the sermons of Luther, and the liturgical context of the Word in Christ’s church. The final step—application to his flock in one particular place—is left to the wisdom of the preacher, to whom this commentary is respectfully entrusted.

This rigorous textual approach was implanted in me by my first NT professor, Roger Humann; refined by my Doktorvater, James Voelz; and matured by constant interaction with my colleagues at Westfield House, Glen Zweck and Reginald Quirk. The desire to integrate all facets of theology, rather than dividing the disciplines, was stirred up by my teachers during graduate studies at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, particularly the Cantabrigians Norman Nagel and Ronald Feuerhahn, as well as OT teachers Paul Schrieber and Horace Hummel. I give thanks to God for my faithful colleagues at Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary, St. Catharines, who were constant resources for this work, particularly Jonathan Grothe, John Stephenson, Duane Peters, and Wilhelm Torgerson. The Concordia Commentary editors protected me from countless embarrassing errors and filled up what was lacking in my very raw manuscript, for which thanks are due to NT editors Jeffrey Gibbs and Curtis Giese, and especially CPH editors Christopher Mitchell and Julene Dumit. My wife, Sara, and children, Anne and Benjamin, who were constantly in my mind as gifts of God while studying Eph 5:21–6:4, were unfailingly generous in giving me over to this massive task. But final thanks, and a heartfelt dedication, are given to my father in the flesh and in the Spirit, Roger Winger, who with my sainted mother, Della, raised me “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4), who baptized, catechized, married, and ordained me, and who remains my beloved companion in the ministry and in the faith.

The Festival of St. Thomas AD 2014
Colossae, likely headed by Pastor Epaphras (Col 1:7; 4:12), Paul responds to a series of problems in that church with the letter to the Colossians. While this writing was relatively fresh in his memory, perhaps within a few weeks, he responds to similar news from Ephesus with the letter to the Ephesians.\textsuperscript{434} The need to send the runaway slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon in Colossae provided the opportunity to send the three letters together in the hand of Tychicus.

**Purpose and Themes**

The textual variant “in Ephesus” (1:1) lies before the interpreter as a fork in the road. The majority of commentators conclude against the originality of this address and choose the path to the left. They see the letter as a circular aimed at a number of churches in Asia Minor and therefore interpret it as a general letter characterized by a rich ecclesiology and Christology. Goodspeed’s fanciful theory about a postapostolic reader of Acts gathering together the letters of Paul and producing Ephesians as a cover letter\textsuperscript{435} may not have many serious adherents, but it represents the prevailing view of Ephesians as a compendium of Pauline thought, which is the view even of most conservative commentators such as Martin Franzmann, Donald Guthrie, and F. F. Bruce.\textsuperscript{436}

But is it just a general letter? Rudolf Schnackenburg avers: “Most Commentaries pay too little attention to the letter’s pragmatic dimension. Almost all proceed from the idea that it has no concrete background; but this would be unique in the whole of the NT literature.”\textsuperscript{437} Many hypotheses have been put

\begin{footnotes}
\item[434] So, e.g., Carson, Moo, and Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament, 308; Deterding, Colossians, 13. Even Best, who denies Pauline authorship, admits that common authorship of the two letters makes good sense: “It is also possible that the two letters had a common author who simply repeated in the second more or less what he had written in the first; this would necessarily imply that the letters were written about the same time and that their common author had a good memory” (Ephesians, 613–14). Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 32, agrees: “It is certain that the author of Eph. knew Col. It is not so certain whether he had it before him while writing and could refer to it as a written document. In spite of [Eph] 6.21 f. it is enough to assume that he had it ‘in his head’ and was so familiar with it that words and phrases from Col. constantly flow from his pen.” So also Schlier, who affirms Pauline authorship:

If one is not burdened by the obsession of a literary dependence of the two letters upon one another, one then recognizes that the intimate connection of the two letters—each of which is in itself complete, unique, and original—can be explained most simply and naturally by focusing on something completely different: that Paul wrote Ephesians not long after he had written Colossians, and in any case at a time when Colossians “was still fresh in his mind” (in the words of E. F. Scott), and his thoughts were still dwelling on the congregations in eastern Asia Minor, and he had the intention of sending Tychicus there. (Epheser, 24–25, quoting Ernest Findlay Scott, The Literature of the New Testament [New York: Columbia University Press, 1932], 181)

\item[435] Goodspeed, The Key to Ephesians, xiv–xvi.
\item[437] Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 23, n. 10. See also Lincoln, Ephesians, xl, who contends that Ephesians, though homiletical, is a real letter addressed to specific concerns among the
\end{footnotes}
forward. Heinrich Schlier sees the letter as a refutation of a growing Gnostic movement. Nils Dahl has developed a complex liturgical theory, viewing the letter as an address to newly baptized Gentiles. J. C. Kirby sees the letter as a reworked homily for a baptismal renewal ceremony on Pentecost. Ernst Käsemann believes it was written to further the cause of early Catholicism in the postapostolic era. But all these theories falter on a complete lack of evidence within the historical record of the NT.

The present introduction, contending for the originality of the address “in Ephesus” and therefore walking the path to the right of the fork, has sketched the historical background to Ephesians on the basis of the record of Acts and Paul’s other letters. Drawn together, those data paint a very rich picture of the problems in the Ephesian church and in Paul’s life and help us to discern the verbal tools with which he responded.

**False Teaching and Paganism**

The possibility of false teaching threatening the Ephesian church from the inside is rarely investigated, chiefly because Ephesians does not specifically mention any false teachers. But there are plenty of clues. The record of Acts tells us that the Ephesian church was troubled by faulty theology at its very founding, as Apollos misunderstood both Baptism and the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24–26; 19:1–3; see “Baptism and the Spirit,” below in “Purpose and Themes”). Paul’s sermon to the Ephesian pastors (Acts 20:18–35), delivered some months after he was prematurely driven from the city (Acts 20:1), contains both explicit and implicit references to false teaching. “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among you yourselves will arise men speaking distorted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30). Was this merely a prophetic

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churches of Asia Minor. Even Romans, once treated as Paul’s “dogmatics,” is now related more closely to the situation of the Roman church and Paul’s proposed visit there on his way to Spain. See, for example, the essays in Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

See Best, *Ephesians*, 63–75, for a range of proposals.


Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Dopet i Efesierbrevet,” *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 21 (1945): 85–103; N. A. Dahl, “Adresse und Proömium des Episperbriefes,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 7 (1951): 241–64. Dahl himself later admitted (“The Concept of Baptism in Ephesians,” in *Studies in Ephesians*, 415): “Against the suggestion that I myself presented many years ago [1945, p. 99; 1951, p. 261], it has been correctly objected that in early Christianity, as well as later, it was completely possible that when readers or hearers were reminded of their baptism, it need not have been a recent event but may have also happened long ago.”

Kirby, *Ephesians: Baptism and Pentecost*.

Käsemann, “Ephesians and Acts.”

See “The Textual Variant ‘in Ephesus’ in Ephesians 1:1” in “Addressees” above.

See “Authorship,” “The City of Ephesus and Paul’s Relationship to It,” “Location and Date of Writing,” and “Relationship to Colossians” above.
warning of a distant, post-Pauline era? His subsequent admonition to “keep alert” and his reference to his own vigilant three-year ministry among them (Acts 20:31) suggest, on the contrary, that the threat was already at hand. Paul implies he is aware of specific men who will spring upon the flock as soon as he is gone. His decision to meet with the Ephesian pastors, despite his hurry to reach Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16–17), likewise suggests that there was an immediate concern. The lurking wolves may well be the false teachers whom Timothy had opposed and removed from office before ordaining new presbyters in accord with Paul’s instructions (1 Timothy 1–3). If Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was written short weeks later from imprisonment in Caesarea, we might view it as the counterpart of his sermon to the pastors. Writing to the whole church in Ephesus, he reiterates what he first taught their pastors (Acts 20:18–35). After encouraging the church to view their new pastors as gifts of the ascended Christ (Eph 4:7–12), Paul warns the Ephesians that they need to grow in the knowledge of Christ, that they should “no longer be infants, so as to be tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, in the trickery of men, in craftiness in accordance with deceitful scheming which leads into error” (4:14). Thus, one purpose of Ephesians is to inculcate a love of God’s truth in Christ (4:15, 21, 25; 6:14) and to value the pastors who teach it to his people.

Yet, like all the churches of the ancient world, the church in Ephesus was equally threatened by the philosophical and religious environment in which it was located. The twin letter to the Colossians is more explicit in describing the kind of syncretistic, ascetic, Jewish-Gnostic religious philosophy that was prevalent, what Paul calls the διδασκαλίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, “teachings of men” (Col 2:22). That similar deceptive thinking threatened the Ephesian church is clear from Paul’s first letter to Timothy, who was representing him in Ephesus. Bo Reicke sums up the evidence from 1 Timothy:

Evidently the heresy was a sort of Judaism, known partially from Galatians, but here reinforced by special claims that were based on genealogies ([1 Tim] 1:4). This Jewish pretentiousness (cf. 2 Cor. 11:22) led to legalism ([1 Tim] 1:7; cf. Titus 3:9), asceticism ([1 Tim] 4:3; cf. Col. 2:21), and materialism ([1 Tim] 6:5; cf. Phil. 3:19). The concluding rejection of a “falsely so-called knowledge” ([1 Tim] 6:20) corresponds with Paul’s words against the Corinthian overemphasis on wisdom and knowledge (1 Cor. 1:18–2:16). This “knowledge” was only a preliminary stage of the later philosophy referred to as gnosticism.

445 The letter to the Ephesians in Rev 2:1–7, presumably written decades after Paul’s, speaks of the Ephesians’ rejection of false apostles and the works of the Nicolaitans. Ignatius, To the Ephesians, 7:1–2; 9:1, alludes to a Docetic heresy threatening the Ephesians.

446 In the chronology we have adopted above, 1 Timothy was written before Ephesians, shortly after Paul left Ephesus (Acts 20:1). Yet if 1 Timothy was written a few years after Ephesians, its description of the religious and philosophical environment in Ephesus would remain relevant.

447 Reicke, Re-examining Paul’s Letters, 58.
The dichotomy between false and true “knowledge” (1 Tim 2:4; 6:20; also 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1) resonates well with the contents of Ephesians (1:8–9, 17–18; 3:1–12, 17–19; 4:13). What Paul’s letter to the Ephesians sharpens to a fine point, however, is the danger posed to Christians by the pagan religion of their former lives, symbolized graphically in Ephesus by the temple and cult of Artemis Ephesia. To those Christians who had been rescued from their pagan past by their baptismal death and resurrection in Christ, their former “life” was a kind of walking death to which they dared never return (Eph 2:1–10). The promise of acceptance, sexual pleasure, power, and worldly success was a perpetual enticement as they watched their friends and neighbors participating in the old ways. But Paul warns them fiercely that they cannot return to that old worship or have fellowship with the works of darkness (4:17–24; 5:3–14). He encourages them to immerse themselves in the true worship of Christ inspired by the Spirit (5:15–20). They were living in a battle with foes more powerful than flesh and blood (6:12). Yet the constant message of Ephesians is that Jesus Christ has risen and ascended far above any earthly or heavenly powers (1:20–23; 3:10). Since he has defeated all their spiritual enemies, Christians can stand firm in battle, clothed in the armor and weapons of the Victorious One (6:10–17).

**Jews and Greeks in the Body of Christ**

Paul’s opening prayer (1:3–14) serves as a prologue to the epistle, briefly touching on the themes and language that will be developed later. It is therefore significant that he introduces there a subtle distinction between “us” and “you”:

12 that we should be to the praise of his glory, [we] who first hoped in Christ;  
13 in whom also you, having heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, … having also believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. (1:12–13)

It is possible that the distinction is merely between longstanding Christians like Paul and recent converts like the Ephesians. But subsequent evidence in the epistle suggests that Paul has in mind a contrast between Jewish Christians and Gentile converts. Paul subsequently describes “you” as people who formerly were not only dead in sin, but who also lived under the dominion of the prince of this world (2:1–2). When he proceeds to describe the former situation of “we/us all,” he speaks only of conduct “in the passions of our flesh” and being “by

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448 Ephesians uses γνωρίζω, “to make known” (Eph 1:9; 3:3, 5, 10; 6:19, 21), more often than any other NT book; it has six of the twenty-four NT occurrences (three of which are in Colossians).

449 See “The Temple of Artemis Ephesia” and “The Cult of Artemis Ephesia” in “The City of Ephesus and Paul’s Relationship to It” above.

450 Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 49, cites the long list of interpreters who understand “[we] who first hoped” (1:12) as Jewish Christians: Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, Abbott, Beare, Meinertz, Schlier, Scott, Barth, Bultmann, Lyonnet, and Mitton. Schnackenburg himself prefers to read it as “all Christians” (64); so also Dahl, “Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *Studies in Ephesians*, 445.
nature children of wrath like the rest” (2:3). This contrast would be consistent with a distinction between Jewish (“we”) and Gentile (“you”) believers, as Paul would scarcely have accused faithful OT believers of being under the devil’s dominion before they acknowledged that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, though he would admit that they were sinful by nature. Only in the following pericope does Paul fully show his hand:

11 There, therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by what is called Circumcision (made in the flesh by hands), 12 that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. (2:11–12)

As this unit develops (2:11–22), it becomes clear that Paul is deeply concerned with the relationship between God’s chosen people, Israel, and the rest (οἱ λοιποί) of the world (Eph 2:3)—a subject rarely noticed outside Galatians and Romans. At the heart of the unit, Paul declares that Christ has destroyed the hostility and bridged the divide between the two peoples by uniting them in his one body on the cross (Eph 2:14–16).

Why is the opposition between Jew and Gentile a concern of this letter? The answers lies either in the situation of the Ephesians or in Paul’s own—or in both. On the one hand, the story of Paul’s mission in Ephesus discloses sufficient reasons for the concern. Luke reports more than once that Paul’s message went to both Jews and Greeks at Ephesus and that he won believers from both groups (Acts 19:10, 17; 20:21). Yet, as usual, it was also true that many Jews rejected the Gospel (Acts 19:9). As they watched Paul’s success, they became increasingly hostile toward his mission—and the Jews were not an insignificant force in the area. During the silversmiths’ riot in the theater, prompted by the impact that the Christian message was having on the cult of Artemis Ephesia, the crowd turned against Alexander as he attempted to speak for the Jews (Acts 19:33–34). Thus, the Jews who did not accept Christianity may have seen the upstart religion as a threat to their own religious freedom, established by the Roman authorities. The extent of their hostility can be gauged by the facts that the Jews in Greece (probably prompted by the Ephesians) immediately afterward plotted against Paul’s life (Acts 20:3) and that some of the “Jews from Asia” pursued him all the way to Jerusalem to denounce him before the Sanhedrin and were instrumental in getting him arrested in the temple (Acts 21:27; 24:18–20).

How might this hostility have affected the church at Ephesus? Acts is clear that some Jews entered into the Christian church. But Paul’s letter addresses the Ephesian congregation as if it were entirely or mostly Gentile (1:12–13; 2:1–2, 11–19; 3:1). It refers to the Ephesians’ recent conversion, Baptism, and catechesis (1:13, 18; 2:5–6; 4:4, 20) and warns them against returning to a pagan

451 MacDonald, Colossians and Ephesians, 9: “Given the presence of Jewish elements in the false teaching described in [Col] 2:16–23 it is important to note the evidence for a significant Jewish minority in the cities of the Lycus Valley.”
life they seem to know personally (4:17–19; 5:3–8). One can only hypothesize about the situation. Was the predominantly Gentile church at Ephesus under threat from unconverted Jews, who might have urged the authorities to deny the Christians such religious freedom as Jews enjoyed on the grounds that Christians were not true heirs of the OT faith? Were Jews within the Christian church devalued or despised by the Gentile majority because of the actions of their unconverted brothers in the flesh? Or is the reverse possible, that the Jews within the church were puffed up by their status as “[we] who first hoped in Christ” (1:12), so that they needed to be reminded that they, too, were “children of wrath like the rest” (2:3)? In this exercise we are limited by the information available in Ephesians; only because Paul appeals to the true unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ (e.g., 2:11–22; 4:1–6) might we deduce that there was a conflict.

What is more demonstrable, however, is that Paul’s own predicament was related to the Jew/Gentile divide. The Jews from Asia who pursued him to Jerusalem claimed that he was teaching κατὰ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τοῦ τόπου τούτου, “against the people [the Jews] and the Torah and this place [the temple]” (Acts 21:28). His arrest was on the charge of violating the temple’s “dividing wall” (cf. Eph 2:14) that kept Gentiles distant from the place of sacrifice and the Holy of Holies (Acts 21:28). The Greek whom they assumed he had taken into the temple was “Trophimus the Ephesian” (Acts 21:29). Thus, as we have proposed, the Ephesian Christians may have concluded with trepidation that they were responsible for the arrest of Christ’s apostle.

Paul’s letter responds to this fear with a double message. First, he argues that the divide between Jew and Gentile has been erased in Christ. Jesus carried both peoples in his own body on the cross, killing the hostility between them by reconciling them both to God (2:14–16) and drawing them both into God’s presence, thus removing the distance that once kept the Gentiles farther away from God than the Jews (2:13, 17–18). In Christ they have together been made into a new people of God (2:19)—indeed, they are the true Israel.

452 Käsemann, “Ephesians and Acts,” 291, postulates that this is a sign of the letter’s late, postapostolic provenance: “The letter betrays its historical setting precisely here. What Paul mentioned hypothetically in Rom. 11:17 ff. has happened here: Jewish Christianity is pushed aside and despised by the steadily growing Gentile Christianity.” Yet such conditions may not have arisen only in the postapostolic era. Local circumstances could have created this situation within Paul’s lifetime. MacDonald, Colossians and Ephesians, 19: “It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Eph 2:11–22 spoke in general to the realities of a community comprised of a Gentile majority and a dwindling Jewish minority.”


454 Barth, Ephesians, 1:66, remarks: “Ephesians, more than any other NT epistle, will press the point that Gentiles receive no salvation other than the one they share with Israel and receive through the Messiah. It is the salvation first promised and given to this people alone: Israel.” Reicke, Re-examining Paul’s Letters, 13–15, 21–25, 37–38, argues that Paul’s encounter with rising Jewish Zealotism (which culminated in the rebellion against Rome in AD 66–73) was a factor in his addressing the status of Gentile Christians.
been built into a new temple (2:20–22) and incorporated as members of Christ’s own body (1:23; 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16–17; 5:23, 30). They are one church (4:4–6). This is the great mystery that has been revealed to Paul.\footnote{Schlier, Epheser, 20–22, explains that the revelation that the church consists of Jews and Gentiles together is a theme that has moved from the background of other Pauline epistles into the foreground of Ephesians. It is the mystery that has been revealed. “He now does not merely pray for God’s wisdom and knowledge for them ([Eph] 1:17; cf. 3:16ff.; 4:13), but he himself brings it to them in his letter. … This letter is thus not ‘Kerygma’ in the narrow sense of 1 Cor 1:18ff., which lies as the necessary foundation of wisdom, but it is wisdom, the wisdom of the mystery” (21–22).} The emphasis on ecclesiology in Ephesians is a corollary of its emphatic denial of any such distinction in the body of Christ.

Second, Paul’s own mandate, given directly by Christ speaking to him from heaven (3:1–12), compels him to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles and bring them into the kingdom. There can be no division between Jew and Gentile if Christ himself wills Paul’s mission. And so the Ephesian Christians should not lose heart over Paul’s imprisonment, which is not to their shame but to their glory (3:13). The letter to the Ephesians is therefore a significant word of consolation to a troubled people.

**Baptism and the Spirit**

Paul’s response to the threat of Gentiles backsliding into their old pagan life was to assert the superiority of the Christ who has ascended far above every power or name that is named. His reply to the thorny problem of Jews and Gentiles within the one body of Christ is more diverse, consisting of a series of tightly ordered rhetorical “proofs.”\footnote{See “Structure and Rhetoric” below.} Yet the proofs are interwoven by a golden thread, a direct or indirect appeal to one great unifying act of God: Holy Baptism. Baptism most likely suggested itself because of the baptismal misunderstanding that lay at the Ephesian church’s founding (Acts 18:24–19:7). Because one group had received a false baptism, the sacrament of unity may have become a cause of division.\footnote{See “Conflict over Baptism and the Spirit (Acts 18:24–19:7)” in “The City of Ephesus and Paul’s Relationship to It” above.} Because Apollos had misinterpreted the Baptism that John practiced, to the point that he did not even teach the person and work of the Holy Spirit (Acts 18:24–26; 19:1–3), Paul went to great lengths in his epistle to detail and exalt the Spirit’s work.\footnote{On a percentage basis, the twelve uses in Ephesians of πνεῦμα, “Spirit/spirit,” to refer to the Holy Spirit stand behind only Galatians (sixteen) and 1 Corinthians (twenty-six).} He also may have concluded that he needed to emphasize the essential unity between John’s Baptism—particularly of Christ himself—and the Baptism conducted in the Christian church subsequent to Christ’s mandate (Mt 28:19). In his prologue (Eph 1:3–14) Paul introduces a series of allusions to Christ’s Baptism and our own, implying that what Christ received all Christians also receive:
• “in him [Christ] he [the Father] chose us for himself” (Eph 1:4; cf. Lk 9:35)
• “that we should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 1:4; cf. 5:27)
• “to be adopted as his [the Father’s] sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5)
• “according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5; cf. Mt 3:16–17)
• “the forgiveness of trespasses” (Eph 1:7; cf. Mk 1:4)
• “which he poured out upon us” (Eph 1:8)
• “you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph 1:13)
• “the deposit of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14)

The present-day reader may find such references to Baptism by way of allusion to Christ’s Baptism to be unconvincing. Few modern commentaries on Ephesians have paid much attention to its baptismal flavor. There is a small but significant body of critical literature hypothesizing that Ephesians is a reworked baptismal rite or homily. Though there is no reason to accept these theories literally (as the only such text we possess is the letter by Paul), their persistence indicates that the letter’s baptismal language is compellingly obvious to many readers. If not a liturgical rite reworked into a letter, it is at least a letter deeply influenced by the baptismal rite (as well as the eucharistic liturgy).

Andrew Lincoln expresses the opposition’s voice: “The single mention of the term ‘baptism’ (4:5) in a context devoted not to baptism but to unity, and a few metaphors, behind which a baptismal reference may lie, make it unlikely that baptism itself was a major concern in the writing of the letter.” Yet ancient writers were much more likely to assume and recognize baptismal allusions in

459 These allusions to Christ’s Baptism are explored in more detail in the textual notes and the commentary on 1:3–14 and in Winger, “‘One Baptism’ and the Purpose of Ephesians.” See also Dahl, “Das Proömium des Epheserbriefes,” 327, and “The Concept of Baptism in Ephesians,” 424–26, both in Studies in Ephesians. 1 Peter’s Berakah prayer also contains clear references to Baptism (1 Pet 1:3–4).

460 Schlier, Epheser, is an exception. So also Patzia, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon. Nils Dahl, if his commentary in the Meyers Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament series (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) had been completed, would have been another.


462 Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 23:

We cannot deny the influence of the liturgy, but along with other kerygmatic, catechetical and exhortatory traditions which enrich the language of Eph., but which cannot be seen in isolation as its constitutive material. The epistolary pattern is not an assumed cloak but a literary form deliberately chosen by the author because it was probably in keeping with the objective or aim of his writing.

463 Lincoln, Ephesians, lxxix. Cf. Arnold, Power and Magic, 135. Lincoln’s own diminished opinion of Baptism may be the reason for his skepticism: “But, although the letter contains some strong baptismal motifs, its content is not simply to be reduced to an exposition of the significance of this rite. Its subject is much broader—Christian existence as a whole” (xl). Is not the entire Christian life lived from one’s Baptism?
The explicit mention of Baptism in the midst of Paul’s culminating argument for Christian unity (4:1–6) is not an exception, but the key to unlock the rich metaphorical allusions that fill the rest of the letter. Baptism is

- adoption as a son (Eph 1:5; cf. Gal 3:26–27; 4:5);
- an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11, 14, 18; 3:6);
- the seal of Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30; cf. 2 Cor 1:21–22);
- being made God’s child (Eph 4:14; 5:1, 8; cf. Jn 3:5);
- enlightenment (Eph 1:18; 5:8–14; cf. Acts 9:18);
- death and resurrection (Eph 2:5; 5:14; cf. Rom 6:1–4; Col 2:11–13);
- sanctifying by washing (Eph 5:26; cf. Titus 3:5–7; Heb 10:22);
- stripping off the old man, putting on the new man (Eph 4:21–24; cf. Gal 3:27); and
- being clothed with Christ (Eph 6:10–17).

From the impact of these repeated baptismal references one might distill the letter’s major theme: *all those who have been joined to Christ by Baptism into his death and resurrection have not only been reconciled to God the Father but have also been united with one another in his body, the church.*

If this theme sounds familiar, it is because we have heard it before!

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:26–28)

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we all were given to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13)

The letter to the Ephesians might be viewed as a “midrash”—an exegetical expansion—on these earlier brief apostolic acclamations. Baptism, Spirit, unity, Christology, and ecclesiology all coalesce here. These are not separate themes,

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465 Deterding, *Colossians*, 161, draws a similar conclusion about Colossians: “Baptism plays a far more significant and extensive role in the message of this letter than the single occurrence of the vocable βαπτισμός (‘Baptism,’ [Col] 2:12) might suggest.”

466 Frequently the baptismal allusion can be demonstrated from parallel passages in Paul, some of which are noted in the bulleted items that follow in the text. For further discussion of these allusions, see Kirby, *Ephesians: Baptism and Pentecost*, 150–61; Dahl, “The Concept of Baptism in Ephesians,” in *Studies in Ephesians*; and Schnackenburg, “‘Er hat uns mitauferweckt’: Zur Tauflehre des Epheserbriefes.” Detailed explication of each allusion may be found in the present commentary’s textual notes on the relevant verses. Compare this list of allusions with the excursus “Baptism in the Message of Colossians” in Deterding, *Colossians*, 161–64.
but the varying bright facets of the baptismal jewel.\textsuperscript{467} It is all about God’s work in Christ for the sake of his children, whom he has washed, cleansed, forgiven, and reconciled through the seal of the promised Holy Spirit. Baptism is our personal Pentecost.\textsuperscript{468}

**Subsidiary Characteristics: Ecclesiology, Christology, Love, and Marriage**

Most of the letter’s remaining distinctive characteristics can be easily related to the above themes, and we need only touch upon them briefly. The emphasis on the universal church has been misused to suggest that the letter belongs to an era of “incipient Catholicism,” when the church as a transparochial organization was supposedly emphasized at the expense of diversity, freedom, and local autonomy.\textsuperscript{469} Yet this analysis misses the mark in more than one way. The noun ἐκκλησία, “church,” occurs nine times in Ephesians (1:22; 3:10, 21; and six times in 5:23–32), in every instance referring to the universal church (see the commentary on 1:15–23). Aside from the very brief epistle 3 John, Ephesians has a greater statistical concentration of church vocabulary than any other NT book. But one must not confuse this universal church with a Catholic institution on this earth. Although Paul describes the pastoral ministry as a gift of God to the church on earth (4:7–16), nowhere does he occupy himself with structural concerns or institutional discipline. The church is universal because Christ is lifted up above all things and encompasses all things in himself (1:10, 20–23). Since all Christians are baptized into him, the church as his body shares in his existence spanning earth and heaven. If the metaphor of the divine marriage, which was rooted in the OT theology of God’s marriage with Israel, was brought to Paul’s mind by his recent observance of Pentecost,\textsuperscript{470} he nonetheless took possession of the ball that was passed to him and dribbled it far beyond his former teammates. That six of the nine uses of the term ἐκκλησία, “church,” occur in his description of the marriage between Christ and his bride (Eph 5:23–32) ought to remind us that ecclesiology is never separated from

\textsuperscript{467} Dahl, “The Concept of Baptism in Ephesians,” in *Studies in Ephesians*, 416:

> It has been customary in dogmatics to treat baptism in a special section as a part of the teaching on the mediation of grace or on the sacraments. Ephesians contains a few texts that can be used in such a presentation, but it never views baptism for its own sake in isolation from salvation in Christ, the gospel, faith, incorporation into the church and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

\textsuperscript{468} Thus, one needs no fantastically concocted theories about a baptismal liturgy enacted on Pentecost (Kirby, Dahl) to explain the letter’s contents. If Baptism is understood as the “cleansing” (5:26) that makes us “holy and without blemish” (1:4), then Barth’s reference to sanctification (God’s making us holy) is apropos: “The whole of Ephesians may be understood as a treatise on the ground, the means, the extension, the purpose of sanctification” (*Ephesians*, 1:66–67).

\textsuperscript{469} See “Incipient Catholicism” in “Arguments against Pauline Authorship” and “Incipient Catholicism” in “Evaluation of the Case,” both in “Authorship” above.

\textsuperscript{470} See the discussion of Pentecost in “Caesarea!” in “Location and Date of Writing” above.
Ephesians 4:1–16

Creedal Unity in the Spirit:
One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

Translation

4 1 So I encourage you—I, the prisoner in the Lord—
to walk in a manner appropriate to the calling by which you were called,
with all humility and meekness, with patience,
bearing with one another in love,
being eager to hold fast the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:

4 one body and one Spirit
—just as you were also called in the one hope of your calling—
5 one Lord, one faith, one Baptism,
6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

7 Now, to each one of us grace was given in accord with the measure of the gift of Christ.
8 Therefore it says:
"When he ascended to the highest place he took captivity captive,
he gave gifts to men."

9 Now, what does "he ascended" mean, if not that he also descended into the lower parts,
the earth? 10 The one who himself descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens,
that he might fill all things.
11 And he himself gave the apostles and the prophets and the evangelists and pastors and teachers,
12 for bringing the saints to completion, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
13 until we all should attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
to the complete man, to the measure of the maturity of the fullness of Christ,
14 that we might no longer be infants, so as to be tossed to and fro by waves and
carried about by every wind of doctrine, in the trickery of men, in craftiness in accordance with deceitful scheming which leads into error,
15 but, being truthful in love, that we might grow up in all things into him, who is the Head, Christ,
16 from whom the whole body, being jointed together and knit together through every ligament supplied, in accord with [his] activity in apportioning each single part, grows bodily toward the building up of itself in love.

Textual Notes

4:1 παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς—The commentary on 3:14–21 and 4:1–16 discusses in detail (and rejects) the assertion that Ephesians is neatly divided at this point into doctrinal (chapters 1–3) and ethical (chapters 4–6) halves. Certainly the clause παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς cannot alone bear the weight of this crass division, even if it be translated as “therefore, I exhort you.” It would need to be demonstrated that exhortation language
all things, then, the effort must be to preserve, in the Church, the doctrine of the Scriptures, pure and in its unity.\textsuperscript{269}

Luther’s careful distinction between the true unity (\textit{unitas}) of the church that is given by God’s Spirit and the harmony (\textit{concordia}) of Christians that they strive to maintain on the basis of agreement in confessing the doctrine of Scripture accords precisely with Paul’s movement from 4:4–6 to 4:7–16. Christians are one; Christ makes them one; Christ provides gifts to maintain that harmony, and all Christians are to seek it as their goal.\textsuperscript{270}

\textbf{The Gift of the Ascended Christ: The Office of the Ministry (4:7–16)}

The next verse serves as a transition: “now, to each one of us grace was given in accord with the measure of the gift of Christ” (4:7). By the words “grace was given,” Paul refers first to the contents of the creed, as just cited in brief (4:4–6). On this basis alone the exegetical consensus that Paul now introduces a \textit{diversity} of gifts should be challenged. His term “grace” (\textit{χάρις}, unlike \textit{χάρισμα}, “[spiritual] gift,” as in, e.g., Rom 12:6 and 1 Cor 12:4) is not the language of diverse gifts, but of common salvation. The grace that is given “to each one of us” (Eph 4:7) is the one faith, one Baptism, to be incorporated into the one body of Christ. Such context necessitates interpreting \textit{μέτρον} not as a different “measure” or amount given to each Christian, but the same “measure,” the overwhelming apportionment whose standard is not the needs or distinctiveness of the individual, but the superabundant merit and generosity of Christ himself. Paul says, in effect, “Look not to what makes you different from one another, but to what has been graciously poured out upon you to bring you into conformity with the image of Christ.” But, second, as a transition, the “grace given” looks forward also to the specific gift of the men named in 4:11 as those who continue to carry out Christ’s gracious work—or rather, those through whom Christ does the giving.

But before exploring those ministerial gifts, Paul sets down the exegetical basis for contending that Christ was in a position to give gifts at all. Quoting Ps 68:19 (ET 68:18), with its description of God as a conquering King being showered with tribute from his joyful subjects, Paul discerns a typological meaning. As God ascended on high to the mount where his temple would be

\textsuperscript{269} Luther, “Sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, Ephesians 4:1–6,” Lenker, 8:288–89; STL 12:896, § 17.

\textsuperscript{270} Hermann Sasse, “Theses on the Seventh Article of the Augsburg Confession,” \textit{The Springfielder} 25.3 (Autumn 1961): 14, explains:

\begin{quote}
The Church of Christ is essentially one, \textit{Una sancta}. The doctrine of the Church is, therefore, always also a doctrine of the unity, the oneness of the Church. Also, the unity of the Church is at the same time a gift and a task, an indicative and an imperative. This becomes clear in the Scripture passage that underlies \textit{Confessio Augustana}, VII, Eph. 4: “There is one body and one Spirit … one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father …” [4:4–6]. This is the indicative. It is bound up with the imperative “that ye walk worthily of the vocation with which ye are called … endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [4:1, 3].
\end{quote}
built, so Christ ascended to the heights of heaven. As God had victoriously led his people out of slavery to the Egyptians into the freedom of the promised land, so Christ had won his victory over the devil and destroyed captivity to sin. Tweaking the verse via Jewish exegetical tradition (which had associated it with Moses on Mount Sinai) and the Targum translation, Paul unveils the true christological meaning of the text, proclaiming that Christ not only “received gifts from men” but “gave gifts to men” (see the second textual note on Eph 4:8). In line with the epistle’s emphasis on the exaltation of Christ (1:20–23; 2:6, with the resurrection and ascension being viewed as a unit), Paul here associates the distribution of the spoils of Christ’s victory on the cross with his ascension to the right hand of God. Perhaps because of a danger of syncretism or fear of hostile forces that troubled Christians in Asia Minor (as is particularly clear in Colossians), Paul stresses the subjugation of all spiritual forces under the feet of this victorious Christ (1:21; 2:2; 3:10; cf. 6:10–12).

The debate over the meaning of “he descended” in Eph 4:9–10 has tended to overshadow the chief point Paul is making. Even the traditional translation, “he led [or set free] a host of captives” (4:8), seems influenced by the ancient belief that Christ’s descent involved a plundering of hell and the release of OT saints. Setting aside for a moment the question of whether Christ’s descent into hell is what Paul has in mind, a more vivid picture appears when the phrase ἵματι ἀιχμαλώσιαν is translated with full force: “he took captivity captive.” Luther, who in his 1546 Bible translates the clause from Eph 4:8 as “hat das Gefengnis gefangen gefüret [‘has led captivity captive’],” captures the drama of the image in his preaching on the text for Ascension Day:

How magnificently, majestically this is said. He has ascended on high and sits above in heaven, in order to imprison the prisons and chain up the stocks. The kingdom, office, and work which he has executed on high is that he has cast captivity into captivity. …

Had he not ascended on high and not led captivity captive, we would have had to remain captive forever. But by his ascending on high he led the great and overpowering, deep and unyielding captivity captive before God, namely, sin to sin, death to death, hell to hell. …


272 The image of the ascending Christ being showered with praise by his subjects is captured well in this hymn: “Up through endless ranks of angels, Cries of triumph in His ears, To His heav’nly throne ascending, Having vanquished all their fears, Christ looks down upon His faithful, Leaving them in happy tears” (Jaroslav J. Vajda, LSB 491:1; © 1974 Augsburg Publishing House; used by permission of Augsburg Fortress).


274 WA DB 7:201. Luther’s marginal note on “das Gefengnis,” “captive,” reads: “Das ist, die Sünde, Tod, und Gewissen, das sie uns nicht fahen, noch halten mögen [‘that is, sin, death, and conscience, that they may not seize or hold us’].” In his “Defense of the Translation of the Psalms” (1531–1533), AE 35:216, WA 38:13, Luther explains his decision to offer a very literal translation, “du … hast das gefengnis gefangen [‘you … took captivity captive’],” in Ps 68:19 (ET 68:18; see WA DB 10/1:312–13), the OT source for Eph 4:8.
Sin, death, devil, and hell had taken us captive; but Christ has in turn taken them captive. ... He takes my captivity captive, intercepts my hangman, intercepts my sins, exterminates my death, damns my hell. ...

Christ’s power and might over sin are now given to those who believe in him, who know that they, too, are masters over sin, while heretofore they were its slaves. Sin will not any longer compel them to transgress against God or to despair, because Christ, ascended on high, helps them resist sin when they believe in him and call upon him. ...

This captivity of sin, which, even though it is not completely dead, nevertheless cannot rule over the believers who are under Christ, continues until Judgment Day. However, on Judgment Day sin will have its head chopped off and be put to death completely. In the meantime sin is confined to prison, bound like a thief with the hangman’s rope. What sin has done to us, that Christ has done to it.275

In our textual notes on 4:9–10 we have presented several arguments against the traditional interpretation that κατέβη εἰς τὰ κατώτερα [μέρη] τῆς γῆς means “he descended into the lower parts of the earth” (4:9) and refers to the descent into hell. The genitive is more likely appositive, “he descended into the lower parts, that is, the earth,” referring to his incarnation and earthly ministry, which forms a better contrast to the ascension into heaven and accords well with Christ’s language, particularly in the Gospel of John. This is not in any way to deny the factuality of the descent into hell event as confessed in the Apostles’ Creed and Article 9 of the Formula of Concord,276 which stands firm on the basis of 1 Pet 3:18–20. It is, in fact, with great reluctance that we diverge from what is the majority interpretation of the text in patristic times and throughout Lutheran history. One would not wish to lend any support to those who deny the existence of hell, the devil, or eternal punishment—matters well-attested throughout Scripture.

But, as with the clause “he took captivity captive,” one might find that the view we have adopted offers a more comprehensive picture of Christ’s victory over the devil. For Christ’s assault on the devil and his destruction of the devil’s power were not confined to the moment of his descent into hell, but began with his incarnation, continued through his earthly ministry, and culminated at the cross, tomb, resurrection (including the descent into hell), and ascension. Already while casting out demons, Jesus declared that he was entering the strong man’s house and binding him (Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21–22). Already when the disciples were sent on their first mission, Christ declared

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276 “We simply believe that the entire person [of Christ], God and man, after the burial descended into hell, conquered the devil, destroyed the power of hell, and took from the devil all his might. ... Thus we retain the substance [sound doctrine] and [true] consolation that neither hell nor the devil can take captive or injure us and all who believe in Christ” (FC SD 9:2–3 [Triglotta, 1051, 1053]).
that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven (Lk 10:18). In the wilderness Christ defeated Satan with the Word of God (Mt 4:1–11), and on the cross, as Satan bit Christ’s heel, the Victorious One crushed his head (Gen 3:15). Thus, the defeat of the devil and his forces was accomplished by the entire ministry of Christ, including the descent into hell.

The logical movement from the ascension of Christ (Eph 4:9–10) to the giving of the fivefold office of the ministry (4:11) may escape commentators whose theological instincts do not incline them to appreciate this gift. But the logic is not so obscure as it might at first seem. All four Gospels conclude with the sending of the apostles to preach the forgiveness of sins.277 The longer ending of Mark (16:9–20) and two passages in Luke’s writings (Lk 24:45–51; Acts 1:7–9) explicitly connect this mandate with the ascension.278 It is through his apostles’ teaching and baptizing in his name that Christ continues to be with his church until the close of the age (Mt 28:20). The connection of the office with baptizing and teaching also suits the present context well. The creed to which Paul has just appealed (4:4–6) can only bring harmony if it is actually taught and if the Baptism it proclaims is actually administered. Thus, first, the ministry is introduced as the means Christ puts in place to convey the gifts of grace that have just been confessed.279 But, second, the ministry has a more distinctive role to play in furthering the concordia toward which Paul urges the Ephesians. It has been noted that what unites the five offices named in 4:11 is the preaching or teaching of the Word. Thus, if there is to be unity in the “one faith” (4:5), it will best be attained by careful, faithful, truthful, and loving teaching.280 The office of the ministry comes into play as one more instrument in Paul’s orchestra.

277 Mt 28:16–20; Mk 16:14–20; Lk 24:45–51; Jn 20:19–23. Of course, the longer ending of Mark (16:9–20) is almost universally acknowledged to be a secondary addition to the text, but it likely includes genuine tradition about Christ.

278 Stoeckhardt, Ephesians, 199–200, astutely reveals the inverse aspect of this argument, that the victorious ascension of Christ makes the ministry possible:

Thus this conquest of the foes of Christ and this leading them in triumph make possible and feasible the bestowal of the gifts of grace and all that is connected with it, namely, the successful work of the shepherds and teachers whom the Lord has given to His Church. By conquering Satan, by fettering him when He descended into hell, and by leading him in triumph when He ascended into heaven, Christ has in advance opened and cleared a road for the teachers of the Church. … Thus is prepared an effective comfort for the ministers of the Word, since they know beforehand that the devil, who is continually at work trying to frustrate their work, is a fettered prince, a prisoner of the Lord Christ, that he cannot and dare not go farther than Christ permits.

279 With the institution of each means of grace, our Lord also institutes the office of the ministry to administer it (Mt 16:19–20; 26:26–29 [and parallels]; 28:16–20; Mk 16:15–16; Lk 10:16; Jn 20:21–23). See Winger, “The Office of the Holy Ministry according to the New Testament Mandate of Christ.”

280 Dahl, “Interpreting Ephesians: Then and Now,” in Studies in Ephesians, 468, correctly interprets Paul’s purpose not as glorifying the status of the ministers but as highlighting their role:

But I doubt that the interest of the author lies in either a charismatic … or an institutional … ministry. His whole emphasis revolves rather around the task, the role, the function of ministers, namely to promote unity in faith and knowledge of the Son of
It is all too easy to flatten Paul’s thought patterns by pressing this passage into the mold of the body of Christ metaphors in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Though they are not in contradiction, these passages are treating rather different concerns. The recognition of the distinctive role of each individual member, with the unique gifts the Spirit has given, forms the warp and woof of those passages, but simply is not the fabric of Ephesians. In fact, quite ironically, to insist that the distinct gift of Eph 4:7–12 (the office of the ministry’s unifying role) be identical to the diverse gifts of those other passages would contradict the very diversity they proclaim. Paul must be permitted to rejoice in the gifts as he sees fit without our objecting that he has neglected some. What suits his purposes in the present passage is to mark those men who are gifts to the church from above, who bring the Lord’s unity to people whose harmony is perhaps strained from within. Thus, even Paul’s language resists the urge to make the bodily members help themselves.

Despite how 4:11 has often been translated, it does not refer to “spiritual gifts” in the way we typically think of them. Paul does not point to the ability to be a pastor as a gift to be sought within Christians, but speaks of “pastors” as a concrete gift from Christ. This meaning is made amply clear by the first two (or three) terms in the list. “The apostles” (not the gift of apostleship) are men whom the Lord himself chose, mandated, and sent to the church, in fact, to bring churches into existence through his creative Word. They are a foundational (2:20) source of unity because they speak for Christ with unique authority; the church that falls away from apostolic teaching defines the word “apostate.” Although a precise referent is difficult to determine, “prophets” and “evangelists” appear to be adduced by Paul in a similarly foundational role (see the third and fourth textual notes on 4:11). “Pastors” and “teachers” (see the fifth textual note on 4:11) are of no use unless they continue in the path of apostolic teaching; but where they are faithful, the church is built up in oneness.

Because the terms are concrete, referring to specific men whom the Lord has given, it is in a sense correct to say that Paul is not talking here about “offices.” But if the opposite of “offices” is mere “functions,” then the latter has moved farther away from his meaning. Paul is not simply saying that “teaching” and “shepherding” need to happen (and how would one speak of “apostling” as a mere function?). The Ephesians need to know where they may find these functions with the certainty that they are there as gifts of the Lord. So Paul speaks of the men themselves. But he does not speak of “Paul” or “Peter” or “Timothy”; and in this sense, because he uses titles not names, it is indeed correct to say

God and thus to ward off these many winds of doctrine so that the church, united in all its limbs, can grow up to the head who is Christ (4:13–16).

281 If we were to speak of such, it is the officers themselves who are the spiritual gifts (Schlier, Epheser, 195).

282 “Functions” is used by, for example, Barth, Ephesians, 2:436; Best, Ephesians, 388–99.
that Paul speaks of the gift of *offices* for the church.\textsuperscript{283} The movement among the five from “apostle” to “pastor” and “teacher” implies a continuation of these offices beyond the apostolic generation, “to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). One generation of pastors is replaced by another, in such a way that Christ’s church is never bereft of his gifts.\textsuperscript{284}

The restriction of the list in Eph 4:11 to ministers of the Word also sets it apart from the somewhat parallel texts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Paul appeals to the teacher half of the equation that defines the church as consisting of “teachers and hearers.”\textsuperscript{285} This fact alone should lead us to expect that Eph 4:12 describes the work that the ministers do (not what “the saints” do). The complex stylistic and grammatical questions that have arisen in 4:12 in the interpretation of its three prepositional phrases are addressed in the textual notes. But it is clear that the reinterpretation that would turn “the work of the ministry” (4:12) into general “Christian service” arose in the twentieth century not from a close reading of the Greek text, but from theological presuppositions that generated an instinctive hostility to the office of the ministry. Henry Hamann’s careful study begins with a reference to a typical modern example of that reinterpretation: “Christ did not appoint pastors to do the work of the church by themselves, but *to equip God’s people to be servants, and to do his work for him.*”\textsuperscript{286} Markus Barth’s monumental commentary has given this reinterpretation: “Their ministries are viewed not simply as spontaneous and haphazard functions but more as offices that are constitutive for the life of a Church on the move toward becoming what it already is as the fullness of Christ” (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 268).

\textsuperscript{283} Melanchthon argues not only that the church has the right to call ministers but also that she must call ministers, since Christ wills her to have them:

> For wherever the Church is, there is the authority [command] to administer the Gospel. Therefore it is necessary for the Church to retain the authority to call, elect, and ordain ministers. And this authority is a gift which in reality is given to the Church, which no human power can wrest from the Church, as Paul also testifies to the Ephesians, 4, 8, when he says: *He ascended, He gave gifts to men.* And he enumerates among the gifts specially belonging to the Church *pastors and teachers*, and adds that such are given for the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ.* Hence, wherever there is a true church, the right to elect and ordain ministers necessarily exists. (Treatise, 67 [Triglotta, 523])

\textsuperscript{284} C. F. W. Walther, *Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt* (2d ed.; Erlangen: Deichert, 1865), 251, said: “The congregation, which, when *properly ordered* [gehörig geordnet], consists of both preachers and hearers.” But in his translation of that work, Mueller translated *gehörig geordnet* as “properly organized” (C. F. W. Walther, *Church and Ministry* [trans. J. T. Mueller; St. Louis: Concordia, 1987], 220; emphasis added). The point of the verb *ordnen* is not organization (by human right), but divine institution. Walther’s definition follows Melanchthon’s *Loci Communes*, taken up by Martin Chemnitz in his *Loci Theologici*, who writes under the title “Teachers and Hearers in the Church”: “For since the foundation of the church is the doctrine of Christ taught by the prophets and apostles, Eph. 2:20, the doctrine concerning Christ cannot be taught and cannot be proclaimed in the church unless there are teachers, Rom. 10:14. And … there are promises of the perpetual preservation of the ministry in the church, Is. 59:21; Eph. 4:11” (*Loci Theologici*, part 3 [trans. Jacob A. O. Preus; Chemnitz’s Works 8; St. Louis: Concordia, 1989, 2008], 1312).

tion the veneer of scholarly respectability, but it is clear that Barth himself can find no convincing linguistic support for this new reading. His extended comment “The Church without Laymen and Priests” proceeds on ideological—not exegetical—grounds and evidences what must simply be called an anticlerical spirit. Where exegesis is brought into play, commentators either draw unsupported conclusions from the alternation of the prepositions πρός … εἰς … εἰς (“for … for/to … for/to”) in 4:12 or import a “spiritual gifts” reading of 4:7 and 4:16 into this verse.

Paul’s thesis is that when Christ ascended on high, he did not abandon the church, but gave her men as teachers and preachers, who represent him, and through whom he builds up his church. Whether or not this suits a modern, egalitarian view of society is beside the point if we are to take seriously the Scriptures as God’s Word of revelation and instruction. C. F. W. Walther, preaching on this text, warns against a spirit that would reject such a divine gift:

The distinction between preachers and those who hear what they preach is quite certainly not something which is so ordered at the option of church or men. It is so instituted by the Son of God himself, and it is therefore quite clearly a violation of what God has so ordered, indeed nothing other than a rebellion in the kingdom of Jesus Christ when Christians, who have not been rightfully called and put into the holy office, presume to exercise it.

Walther’s harsh word “rebellion” is reminiscent of earlier thoughts prompted by the mini-creed (Eph 4:4–6). If rejection of the unity of the church is rejection of God, then rejection of Christ’s ministry is likewise rejection of Christ.

287 Barth, Ephesians, 2:477–84. Only one Greek word appears in these eight pages of his interpretation.
288 Pejorative terms abound in Barth, e.g., “this interpretation challenges both the aristocratic-clerical and the triumphalistic-ecclesiastical exposition of 4:11–12. It unmasks them as arbitrary distortions of the text” (Ephesians, 2:479).
289 Lincoln, Ephesians, 253, who reads 4:16 as rejoicing in the diversity of roles Christ inspires within the body, nevertheless warns against trumping 4:11–12 with the later verse.
291 Luther, On the Councils and the Church (1539), AE 41:154, identifies the office of the ministry as one of the marks of the church, citing our text:

The church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer. There must be bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things [Word, Baptism, Lord’s Supper, office of the keys] or holy possessions in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states in Ephesians 4 [:8], “He received gifts among men …”—his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teachers and governors, etc. The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person. Otherwise, what would happen if everyone wanted to speak or administer, and no one wanted to give way to the other? It must be entrusted to one person, and he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments. The others should be content with this arrangement and agree to it. Wherever you see this done, be assured that God’s people, the holy Christian people, are present.
This is true because the ministers he has given stand *vice Christi*, “in the place of Christ.”292 It is immensely significant that each of the five titles given in 4:11 is first and foremost an office held by Christ. He is the apostle of the Father, the Prophet, the preacher of the Gospel, the Good Shepherd, the Teacher, who continues to carry out his work through his earthly representatives.

Paul’s purpose, of course, has little to do with modern-day disputes over the distinction between pastor and people. There is no hint of hierarchy or aristocracy in the worst sense of those terms. The term διακονία, “ministry” (Eph 4:12), which Paul applies to the work of Christ’s ministers, does not simply mean “humble service” or “charitable work” as it is often glossed. It refers to authorized, delegated tasks to be carried out by those who have been mandated by the one in authority.293 But ministers of Christ are not only commissioned to do what he tells them; they are also to be Christlike. If the qualities of humility, meekness, patience, and forbearing (4:2) are Christlike virtues to be inculcated in every Christian, how much more are they to characterize the official representatives of Christ in his office? As Christ came in the form of a slave (Phil 2:7), so his ministers serve in Christlike meekness (Mt 20:25–28). The essence of the term “minister” is that all the power and authority a minister wields is delegated from a higher authority, not possessed intrinsically by the minister. As gifts of Christ, the fivefold ministers proclaim not themselves, but him.294

Paul cites the ministers of Christ not for their own sake, but for the sake of the unity of the church.295 First, as noted, they represent Christ himself and therefore unite the church, his body, by bringing the presence of the Head to the church. It is in this sense that Ignatius’ appeal to the episcopacy as a unifying force in the church should be understood. It is not the bishop by himself, but Christ, who unites the church through him:

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293 The reevaluation of the term διακονία, “ministry,” by John Collins (see the first textual note on 3:7), while overturning a modern misconception, was in many ways a return to the traditional understanding of the term. The classic commentator Abbot writes: “But in a connexion like this, where offices in the Church are in question, διακονία can only mean official service; and this does not belong to the saints in general” (The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, 119).

294 “Of course, ministers are to be just that, servants, *servi servorum Dei* [‘servants of the servants of God’]. … We have profane counterparts of this. The head of state in British countries is known as the Prime Minister, the first servant of all the servants of the state. But the idea of ‘above’ and ‘below’ does not at all fit the actual scheme of things, either in the church or in the state” (Hamann, “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12,” 47–48).

295 Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 191:

They do not as a consequence stand above the Church or the rest of the faithful; rather their “office” alone can bind the members of the Church to Christ, the Head, and to one another to serve the building-up of Christ’s Body. But in this sense it is an essential, constitutive component part of the Church. It is an “office of unity” which should ward off deviation and disintegration, unite the Christians through preaching and doctrine, care and exhortation, and lead them to Christ, the Head.
Therefore it is fitting that you should live in harmony with the will of the bishop, as indeed you do. For your justly famous presbytery, worthy of God, is attuned to the bishop as the strings to a harp. Therefore by your concord [ὁμονοίᾳ] and harmonious love [συμφώνῳ ἀγάπῃ] Jesus Christ is being sung. Now do each of you join in this choir, that being harmoniously in concord you may receive the [musical] key of God in unison [ἐνότητι], and sing with one voice [ἐν ϕωνῇ μιᾷ] through Jesus Christ to the Father, that he may both hear you and may recognise, through your good works, that you are members [μέλη] of his Son. It is therefore profitable for you to be in blameless unity [ἐν ὀμοίω τῇ ἐνότητι], in order that you may always commune [μετέχητε] with God.296

But, second, the ministers’ “work of the ministry” (4:12), which is commonly defined as “the ministry of the Word” in NT phraseology,297 is an effective activity which actually brings about the organic growth of Christ’s body.

This growth is the subject of the extended purpose statements that occupy the lengthy extension of Paul’s sentence in 4:12–16. The work of ministry is to effect “bringing the saints to completion” (τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων, 4:12). The meaning of this phrase is clear enough in light of NT parallels,298 but difficult to gloss with a single English equivalent. “Perfecting of the saints” (KJV) can be rightly understood as “bringing the saints to the perfection God has in mind for them,” but is language that is easily misunderstood in moralistic terms. “Equipping the saints” captures the image of the armor of God provided to defend the saints from the devil’s assaults (6:10–17), but is tainted today by its connection with “everyone a minister” theology (i.e., “equipping the saints to do the work of ministry”). “Bringing the saints to completion,” to the goal God has in store for them, is the most appropriate rendering.299 The phrase’s meaning is, of course, developed by the parallel phrase “for building up the body of Christ” (εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 4:12).

The image evoked is the spiritual temple (2:19–22), which involved three facets: (1) the incorporation of both Jew and Gentile as living stones in the one new temple, thus emphasizing unity; (2) the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone, thus defining the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ as that which builds this temple; and (3) the indwelling of God by the Spirit of Christ300 in this new temple. It is not insignificant that the image (like the body of Christ) is corporate: Paul is addressing not specifically...

296 Ignatius, To the Ephesians, 4:1–2 (trans. Kirsopp Lake, LCL); cf. To the Ephesians, 5:1. The echoes of Paul’s wording in Ephesians are astonishing.
297 See the textual note on εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, “for the work of the ministry,” in 4:12 (the third textual note on that verse).
298 Particularly elucidating are NT parallels with the cognate verb καταρτίζω, “rebuild, repair, reconcile, supply.” See the second textual note on 4:12.
299 “All believers are to be brought to a state of completion, and it is the ministers Christ has given who are the means to this end as they exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership” (Lincoln, Ephesians, 254).
300 See the first textual note on 4:4.
Creedal Unity in the Spirit: One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism

the edification of individuals, but the building up together of the whole church. The rest of the pericope explicates this upbuilding.

The role of the ministry in bringing about unity of belief and confession is stressed in 4:13. [301] “The unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” is achieved through proclaiming the true Gospel. But this knowledge, though it is necessary that it be true (cf. 4:15), is more than intellectual. The role of the ministry is not merely to impart facts, but to bring about—through that knowledge of the faith—the conformity of all members of the church to the image of Christ, “the perfect/complete man” (4:13). [302] There is more than a hint of baptismal language in this verse, as Baptism (confessed in 4:5) is the means by which candidates “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). What simpler path to unity is there than for each individual to be placed into Christ so that all are found together in him? This careful combination of teaching and Baptism (rooted in Christ’s mandate, Mt 28:19–20), which touches mind and spirit, body and soul, pictures vividly the contours of the Word and Sacrament ministry that Paul stresses. It is hardly a fair objection to claim that the role of the other members of Christ’s body are thereby left out of the equation. For Paul’s purpose is to point Christians to the great benefits they receive from this ministry. He addresses concerns over disunity not by asking them to dig deeper and work it out for themselves, but by bringing to light the gifts of Christ that can achieve it.

Certainly in this context every member of the body has a role to play, but Paul describes the church’s role in a passive fashion. [303] The members are no longer to be infants, no longer to be led astray by every wind of false doctrine, no longer to be tricked by every charlatan that sails into town (4:14). This entails vigilance, careful adherence to the confession into which they were baptized, dedication to the Word of God that has been passed down from the apostles of Christ and taught by their pastors. In every respect they are to hold to its truth, including rejoicing in the love of Christ and radiating it to one another (4:15). [304] There can be no unity if they decline the proclamation of the truth and choose

301 Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 268:

These offices are, above all, characterized by service which unifies, which builds up, which stabilizes, and which enables growth toward Christ. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers produce unity and maturity as they proclaim, preserve, and apply the apostolic tradition. The writer is particularly concerned with the part they have to play in contributing to the unity of faith and knowledge, in providing an antidote to false teaching, and in bringing about a community that proclaims the truth in love.

302 “He says that the church’s order has been so formed as to join the human race together in the profession of unity, so that all may be in Christ, having Christ as their single head, that is, as the source of life” (Ambrosiaster, *Ephesians*, 4:12.6, ACCS 8:166).

303 The passive nature of church in her edification is a simple counterpart of her passive role in salvation itself (2:5–8). Such a comparison makes such comments as the following appear quite synergistic: “The church is more than the passive object of ministerial activity (Dahl). Each individual has an important contribution to make if unity is to be maintained and growth to take place” (Best, *Ephesians*, 410).

304 “None of these things are unknown to you if you possess perfect faith towards Jesus Christ, and love, which are the beginning and end of life; for the beginning is faith and the end is
falsehood (cf. 4:25; also Jn 7:18). Ultimately this is because the message pro-
claimed comes from Christ, and the unity it brings is from him.

Thus, Paul closes the argument with a return to the divine Giver. The body
does not grow itself, but receives growth from the Head that provides it with
spiritual energy, ligaments that bind together, and direction for its work (4:16).
Working through his ministers, Christ is the one who ultimately gives edification
to his church, his own body. Ecclesiology has not swallowed up Christology.
It is not about us in the end, but about Christ. But as a servant himself, Christ
devotes all his energy to the growth of his body. The end result is a vitality of
life that shows itself not in disunity, but in love.

A Note on Luther’s Translation of Ephesians 4:12

In Luther’s 1522 translation of the NT, he appears to support the “everyone
a minister” interpretation that is otherwise unattested until the twentieth century:

damit die heyligen alle zusamen gefugt worden, durch gemeynen dienst, zu
bessern den leyb Christi.

so that the saints might all be fit together, through common service, to improve
the body of Christ.

Tyndale (1534) follows this early Luther translation: “that the saints might have
all things necessary to work and minister withal, to the edifying of the body of
Christ.” But most interestingly, Luther completely reworked the translation
for the second edition of his NT published in 1527:

das die heyligen geschickt seien zum werck des ampts, zur besserung des
leibs Christi.

that the saints might be prepared for the work of the office, for the improve-
ment of the body of Christ.

love, and when the two are joined together in unity it is God, and all other noble things follow
after them” (Ignatius, To the Ephesians, 14:1 [trans. Kirsopp Lake, LCL]).

Contra, e.g., Barth: “The body makes its own growth so that it builds itself up in love”
(Ephesians, 2:447). “It is he [Christ] who gives each individual saint the right and the equip-
ment to be, to live, and to act as a distinct person. Every saint is to make his own contribution
to the mission and unity of the church” (2:450).

Christ builds his church (Mt 16:18), and he does so through his ministry. As Melanchthon
explains this passage: “As to the statement, ‘On this rock I will build my church’ (Matt.
16:18), it is certain that the church is not built on the authority of a man but on the ministry
of the confession which Peter made when he declared Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God.
Therefore Christ addresses Peter as a minister and says, ‘On this rock,’ that is, on this minis-
try” (Treatise, 25).

WA DB 7:200.

William Tyndale, Tyndale’s New Testament (in a modern-spelling edition and with an intro-

WA DB 7:200, footnote. For a chart showing the different editions of the Lutherbibel pub-
lished in Wittenberg, see WA DB 6:XXI–XXIII. On the abbreviations and sigla used in the
footnotes in WA DB 6–7, see WA DB 6:XCII–XCIV.
Luther then changed the last part of the verse again in the first edition of his NT published in 1530:

das die heyligen geschickt seien zum werck des ampts, dadurch der leib Christi erbawet werde. 310

that the saints might be prepared for the work of the office, through which the body of Christ is built up.

In the second edition of 1527, Luther also added a new marginal notation:

geschickt) Das ist, wol gerüsst, und allenthalben versorget und zubereit, das nichts feile zum Ampt der Christenheit etc. 311

(prepared) That is, well equipped, and in every respect provisioned and prepared, that nothing should be lacking for the office of Christendom, etc.

The new translations and marginal note indicate a thoroughgoing change of interpretation of the text. Rather than speaking of a “common service,” Luther now understands Paul to be talking about the ongoing provision of ministers for the church. Luther interprets the text as saying that one of the duties of the pastoral office is to perpetuate itself, to take some Christians and make them into pastors through proper training. Through this ongoing provision of pastors for the church, the body of Christ is built up. This shift in interpretation would be consistent with Luther’s general tendency to defend the office more vigorously in the late 1520s, particularly in the face of the sneak preachers and Schwärmer. 312 Beginning in 1541 a slight change appears in subsequent editions of the Lutherbibel (“geschickt seien,” “might be prepared,” becomes “zuggerichtet werden,” “might be trained”), 313 but otherwise the preservation of the translation indicates that Luther is happy with this interpretation to the very end.

Unfortunately, later “upgrades” of the Lutherbibel confuse the meaning by changing the word “Ampt,” “office,” to “Dienst,” “service.” This infelicitous change thoroughly distorts the unique interpretation Luther had given (essentially that Paul was advocating seminary education!), shifting it toward the modern notion of generic service.

310 WA DB 7:200–201, footnote.
311 WA DB 7:201, margin note and footnote.
312 See Luther, “Infiltrating and Clandestine Preachers” (1532), AE 40:379–94, though it is poorly translated in the AE and the translation often contradicts Luther’s argument. See also, e.g., Lowell C. Green, “Change in Luther’s Doctrine of the Ministry,” Lutheran Quarterly 18 (1966): 173–83.
313 WA DB 7:201. WA DB 4:388 indicates that, during group labor on revising the translation in 1540, the new phrase “zuggerichtet werden” was added to Luther’s draft revision in the handwriting of Georg Rörer, the group’s secretary.
times for whom the modern church ought to apologize, but is a “critic” through the lens of the Gospel.

When the apostles Peter and Paul teach subordination, they do not thereby sanction the social, political, economic status quo, but, in fact, acknowledge how riddled it is with sin and the abuse of power. They do not propose a social or political agenda for the reformation and transformation of a society by the behaviour of its lower classes. Nor do they reinforce cultural roles or stereotypical patterns of behaviour in marriage, family life, and society at large. Instead, they show how Christians can already now, by faith, live with God as citizens of heaven within the earthly orders of a fallen world, because Christ has transformed the whole human life cycle from the womb to the tomb by His incarnation and His exaltation. Christ does not abolish the old divinely instituted orders of family and government to free His disciples from life in community, but He redeems these orders so that they can accomplish their proper purpose.187

**Holy Matrimony and the Gospel**

The preceding section endeavored to rethink subordination in biblical terms, to shift our understanding of the divinely mandated structure of human existence away from modern prejudices rooted in egalitarianism that would view order only in terms of oppression and devaluation. God’s order is a gift and may be received as such and cherished joyfully by the Christian whose will has been transformed by the indwelling Spirit. Thus, though we shall highlight the fundamentally Gospel orientation of this pericope (below), as the revelation of God’s will for human thoughts, words, and deeds this text also contains a clear word of Law. Abiding by this word of Law carries the promise of a well-ordered marriage in which the delivery of God’s blessings can be found. For Christians, though we fail to live up to its standard and our marriages constantly need God’s forgiveness, this Law is nevertheless a joy to fulfill, particularly since its fulfillment entails conformity to Christ. The majority of ancient commentators focus in this way on what the pattern of Christ and the church means for the Christian practice of marriage.188 A fine representative of this pattern of exegesis is Chrysostom:

> Have you noted the measure of obedience? Pay attention to love’s high standard. If you take the premise that your wife should submit to you, as the church


188 The conclusions drawn by Schnackenburg in his survey of the fathers include the following:

(1) The writers of the early Church without exception took the quotation in v. 31 to refer directly to human marriage and then only in a second step referred the “great mystery” to Christ and the Church; (2) The Fathers, who look back to the divine establishment of marriage on the morning of Creation, make no basic difference between a “natural marriage” and Christian marriage; (3) the marriage established by God is regarded as good and holy in the repulsing of other conceptions, especially in Gnosticism; (4) considerable consideration is given to the figurative character of marriage in relationship to Christ and the Church, but it is evaluated in various ways. (*Ephesians*, 332)
submits to Christ, then you should also take the same kind of careful, sacrificial thought for her that Christ takes for the church. Even if you must offer your own life for her, you must not refuse. Even if you must undergo countless struggles on her behalf and have all kinds of things to endure and suffer, you must not refuse. Even if you suffer all this, you have still done not as much as Christ has for the church. For you are already married when you act this way, whereas Christ is acting for one who has rejected and hated him. So just as he, when she was rejecting, hating, spurning and nagging him, brought her to trust him by his great solicitude, not by threatening, lording it over her or intimidating her or anything like that, so must you also act toward your wife. Even if you see her looking down on you, nagging and despising you, you will be able to win her over with your great love and affection for her.\(^{189}\)

This concern for the husband and wife’s behavior toward one another, with Christ and the church as a pattern, is certainly present in the text. Though for Paul it is a secondary focus of his teaching, he is careful at each stage of his proclamation of Christ to remind the married couple that there are implications for the way they treat each other (5:24, 28, 33). As even ancient writers like Chrysostom noticed, Paul reserves the greater extent of his admonitions for the husband in his responsibility to love and sacrifice himself for his wife. Yet Paul does not shrink from admonishing the wife to submit to her husband. In this Paul is thoroughly consistent with NT teaching.\(^{190}\)

However, despite the prominence of the word “obey” in traditional marriage rites,\(^{191}\) our analysis of ὑποτάσσω (whose passive is translated as “be subordi-
nate” in 5:21, 24) has demonstrated that “being subordinate” is not adequately or comprehensively rendered with the vocabulary of obedience.\(^\text{192}\) Obedience may be a consequence of subordination, but is not its immediate meaning.\(^\text{193}\) It is interesting to note that in 6:1–9 the more usual verb ὑπακούω, “heed, obey,” is applied to children (6:1) and slaves (6:5),\(^\text{194}\) but it does not occur here in chapter 5 with reference to wives. Thus, while Paul could have called on wives to “heed, obey,” it appears that he made a deliberate choice to use the passive of ὑποτάσσω, “be subordinate.”\(^\text{195}\)

This, too, was a countercultural move for Paul. Giving orders and obeying them is an ancient conception of the marital relationship of husband and wife that Paul does not adopt in toto. Hellenistic Judaism often calls for wives to obey their husbands, while the use of Paul’s vocable ὑποτάσσω for the relationship is rare.\(^\text{196}\) Likewise, Plato, quoting Homer, says: “Each one gives law to his

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\(^\text{192}\) As translations of ὑποτάσσω, particularly in the present context, “to obey,” “to submit,” and “to be subject” are inadequate if they imply a servile or debased act of passive submission to the will of another rather than a willing acceptance of an order. See Kleinig, “Ordered Community,” 50, n. 13.

\(^\text{193}\) G. Delling, “ὑποτάσσω,” TDNT 8:41. Stoeckhardt’s interpretation is therefore not faulty for its old-fashioned ring, but because it misinterprets the verb: “And just so in wedlock the man is lord and head, he decides, he determines, he commands. Naturally, then, it is the duty of the wife to hearken, to follow, and to submit to the man’s demands” (Ephesians, 241). Paul nowhere in this passage speaks of a husband who “commands” or issues “demands.”

\(^\text{194}\) See the second textual note on 6:1 for the meaning of ὑπακούω, which is not always simply “obey.”

\(^\text{195}\) Kleinig, “Ordered Community,” 51: “Surprisingly, the call for subordination of a Christian wife to her husband does not focus on her obedience to him, but on her respect for him as her head (Eph. 5:22, 33; I Pet. 3:2). Its purpose is for her to receive his love (Eph. 5:24–27), and, if she is married to an unbeliever, to gain his conversion (I Pet. 3:1–2).” The use of ὑπακούω, “heed, obey,” for Sarah’s response to Abraham (1 Pet 3:6) is an exception to this linguistic pattern—though Paul would certainly agree that obedience is a component of wisely subordination.

\(^\text{196}\) Lincoln, Ephesians, 367.
children and to his wives.” 197 And Aristotle asserts: “The male is by nature fitter to command than the female.” 198 The distinction between such ancient thinkers and Paul was often lost on Christian commentators in ancient times. Aquinas, for example, might be mistaken for Aristotle when he writes: “The relation of a husband to his wife is, in a certain way, like that of a master to his servant, insofar as the latter ought to be governed by the commands of his master.” 199 But though Paul draws certain parallels between the three relationships of marriage (5:21–33), family (6:1–4), and servanthood (6:5–9), obedience is not the chief thought.

What the three hold in common is rather the way in which they are all conformed to the pattern of Christ’s relationship with the church. And it is here that the distinction between subordination and obedience is most critical. Subordination may entail obedience, 200 but to equate the two is to shift the meaning significantly and to distort the typology of Christ and the church. If marriage is adduced by Paul as an image of Christ and the church—or vice versa—then to identify obedience as its chief characteristic is to forfeit the Gospel. That is to say, if obedience is the chief way in which the wife operates toward her husband, then by way of Paul’s analogy it would also be the chief way in which the church operates toward Christ. The church’s (and therefore also the individual Christian’s) chief duty would then be to obey Christ. This is to formulate the relationship entirely in the way of the Law. Once again, it is certainly true that the Christian (and the church) is obligated to obey Christ; to deny this is to deny his Lordship, his headship, his very divinity. Yet the church’s chief modus operandi in her relationship with her divine Bridegroom is faith. For the church, subordination to Christ means relinquishing the act of redemption to him, allowing him to be the Savior rather than seeking in any synergistic or Pelagian manner to save herself (an effort that would surely fail).

Paul’s ultimately Gospel orientation in this pericope is clear from a number of features. First, the very balance of his language is decidedly weighted toward the work of Christ for the church. It is not simply that Paul has more to say to the husband than to the wife when he allots three verses to the latter (5:22–24) and six to the former (5:25–30). More significantly, the words to the husband are utterly dominated by proclamation of the saving work of Christ. Even the words to the wife are predicated on the central declaration that Christ is the Savior of the body (5:23). Second, Paul’s overriding concern to preach


198 Aristotle, Politics, 1:1259b, quoted in Barth, Ephesians, 2:611, n. 12.


200 “Someone in the marriage relationship has the responsibility for decision and direction. In the ‘order’ that God has designed, the husband has been given that burden” (Scharlemann, “The Pastoral Office and Divorce, Remarriage, Moral Deviation,” 146).
Christ through marriage (not vice versa) is proclaimed by his urgent clarification near the conclusion of the unit “but I say [it refers] to Christ and to the church” (5:32)—which might be translated as “but I am speaking of Christ and the church [i.e., not chiefly about marriage].” Thus, for Paul “the marriage bond is an exhibit and a constant reminder, on the level of the obvious and visible, of God’s agenda at work in history; namely, to bring the totality of all things under the headship of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:10).” Paul’s ultimate goal is not to order earthly relationships, but to preach the Gospel. Finally, the logic of Paul’s presentation is significant: despite his appeal to the creation of Eve from the side of Adam and the institutional mandate for marriage in Genesis (Eph 5:29–32; cf. Gen 2:21–24), Paul’s argument with respect to Christian marriage is not essentially derived from the order of creation. In fact, Paul argues in completely the opposite fashion: from Christ and the church backwards to the order of creation. That is to say, the order of creation, including the institution of marriage for all time and for all people, was set in place so that it might stand as a perpetual proclamation of the Gospel.

This salvation-historical perspective ought to remind us that Paul’s view of marriage as an image of the Gospel does not originate within his creative mind, but is rooted in the way of God with his people Israel in the OT. Though marriage language is not used in the Torah’s account of Sinai, the Rabbinic Judaism of Paul’s day celebrated that making of the covenant as a marriage between God and his people. In preparation for their meeting God at Sinai, the children of Israel were required to be consecrated through the washing of water and clothed in clean robes (Ex 19:10, 14)—baptismal language that is also evocative of the preparation of a bride (of Jerusalem in Ezek 16:9–10; of...
the church in Eph 5:26–27). It may, in fact, be Paul’s recent celebration of Pentecost at the temple, shortly before his arrest (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8), that brought the marriage of God and his people to mind in the writing of this letter. Later OT language is more explicit. The marriage of God to his people is vividly depicted by way of allegory in the messianic Psalm 45, which compares it to the marriage of the king to a princess, and the extended allegory of the Song of Songs. The prophet Isaiah is replete with language of Israel as the Lord’s bride, particularly in the image of holiness as pure clothing and splendid jewelry: “I will rejoice exuberantly in YHWH. My soul will indeed exult in my God, because he clothed me in garments of salvation. In a robe of righteousness he covered me, as a bridegroom dresses like a priest with a beautiful headdress and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels” (Is 61:10; cf. Is 49:18; 62:5; Jer 2:32; Ezek 16:8–14). Because Israel is his bride, the Lord will always redeem her from harm (Is 54:4–8; 62:4–5; Jer 2:2–3). Often it is Israel’s unfaithfulness that is the focus of the image: she is a bride whom the Lord sends away (Is 50:1), a whore (Is 1:21; Jer 2:20) and an adulteress (Ezek 16:15–48; 23:2–49), as is famously depicted by God’s command to Hosea to marry a prostitute. Yet the Lord promises to restore the marriage through the forgiveness of her sins “in that day” (Hos 2:18–23 [ET 2:16–21]) of eschatological restoration (Jer 33:11; Ezek 16:52–63)—a clear messianic promise. Perhaps the most extensive and vivid of all portrayals of the marriage of God to Israel fills the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, a text which gives crucial background imagery for Ephesians 5.

Judaism thought of the coming messianic age as the final renewal of the covenant, when the true marriage feast would take place. Jesus’ use of marriage parables (Mt 22:1–14; 25:1–13) and his reference to himself as the Bridegroom (Mt 9:15; cf. Jn 3:29) demonstrate that he saw himself as the true fulfillment of these expectations. The provision of copious amounts of wine at the Cana wedding may be viewed as Jesus’ pronouncement that the messianic marriage feast had begun (Jn 2:1–11). Paul saw his apostolic ministry as facilitating

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204 The *Mekilta* on Ex 19:10 changes the text from “consecrate them today” to “betroth them today” (quoted in Kirby, *Ephesians: Baptism and Pentecost*, 99).


206 Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 58: “In our opinion, Eph 5:21–33 is the closest biblical parallel to the Song and also is the passage that sheds the most light on the proper hermeneutical approach to the Song.”

207 Hence the OT expression “to whore [יָנָה] after other gods” (Judg 2:17; see also, e.g., Ex 34:15–16; Deut 31:16; Judg 8:33; 1 Chr 5:25).

208 Hos 1:2–3; 2:3–3:5 (ET 2:1–3:5); cf. Jer 3:6–10; 4:30; Ezekiel 23. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs*, 44: “It is striking that marriage itself is a prominent element in the ministries of several prophets [Is 8:3–4; Ezek 24:16–27; Hosea 1–3]. The marriage of these prophets is a prophetic sign, a proclamation of Law and Gospel.” See also his “Antonymous Texts with Adulterous Language” (62–64).

the marriage, presenting the virgin bride to Christ (2 Cor 11:2). The church is feminine not simply because of the gender of the Greek noun ἐκκλησία (“church”) but also because she is always the bride (e.g., Rev 21:2, 9; cf. 1 Pet 5:13; 2 Jn 1, 13). She is also feminine as the birthmother of believers (Is 66:7–13; Gal 4:26). She is the woman who gives birth to the child in the wilderness—an image that rolls together Israel, Mary, and the church (Revelation 12). The anti-church is a prostitute precisely in contrast to the church as bride (Revelation 17–18). The final word of the NT is the invitation of the Bridegroom to his bride, the church, to join him in the eternal feast of heaven (Rev 22:17; cf. Rev 19:7–9; 21:2, 9).

From this biblical survey it is amply clear that Paul neither invented the marriage allegory nor borrowed it from secular sources. It is likewise clear that Paul could not have run the allegory as a simple one-way equation in order to encourage certain behaviors in Christian marriages on the basis of Christ and the church as an illustration. For Paul, the marriage allegory is chiefly a vehicle for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is the friend of the Bridegroom (akin to a best man or, better in modern terms, the father of the bride), who presents the church to Christ in holy marriage (2 Cor 11:2).

Ephesians 5 not only contains a most remarkable restoration of the original institution and purposes of marriage as a blessing to man and wife in this life, but it also transcends the earthly blessings by revealing the mystery of the Gospel hidden in every marriage, if husband and wife would have the eyes of faith to discern it. For, each day as the husband loves his wife in a thoroughly self-sacrificing way, he proclaims Jesus Christ to her and likewise to himself as

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210 Paul’s advocacy of the single life in view of the imminent return of Christ (1 Cor 7:26–35), paralleled by God’s command to Jeremiah to remain single in view of the impending destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 16:1–4), gives evidence that he saw the eternal, eschatological marriage of Christ to his church as the goal toward which all earthly marriages point. Thus, on the cusp of eternity, earthly marriage fades away (cf. Mt 22:30). While Paul might have remained single himself in light of his role as a third party in bringing the bride to Christ (2 Cor 11:2), his example cannot be used to promote an enforced celibacy among clergy in light of his advocacy that the minister be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6) and his warning against those who would forbid marriage (1 Tim 4:3).

211 Nonetheless, this is just an image, and the church is clearly not confined to women (Gal 3:28) any more than the church’s depiction as 144,000 male virgins (Rev 14:3–4), the use of the term “brother” (passim), and the adoption to sonship (e.g., Rom 8:15, 23; Eph 1:5) would imply that the church is restricted to men.

212 See Lessing, Isaiah 56–66, 484–88; Das, Galatians, 477–511, titles his commentary on Gal 4:21–31 “A Tale of Two Birthing Movements.” Cyprian, The Unity of the Catholic Church, 6, expresses the classic Christian image: “One cannot have God as Father who does not have the church as mother” (PL 4:519).

213 On the use of nuptial imagery in the Bible in general, see Mitchell, The Song of Songs, 40–66; Schlier, Epheser, 264–76. Barth, Ephesians, 2:617–18, gives persuasive evidence that the image of head and body for marriage is original to Paul, and not borrowed from contemporaneous authors. It is not rooted in patriarchalism, which was, in any event, on the wane in Greco-Roman culture. “There is as yet no proof that Paul repeated a generally accepted contemporary opinion, and that he contributed to it no more than a few more or less penetrating Christian phrases” (2:618).
he puts to death the old man and emerges in the image of Christ. And each day, as she submits to his love, as she entrusts herself to him, as she respects his headship, she learns ever more the nature of faith and sees the contours of Christ’s redeeming sacrifice in the Christlike figure God has placed into her life. In this way marriage is for the Christian couple a very holy thing.

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214 Luther asks the bride not only to view her husband as her head but also to think “my husband is a picture of the true, exalted Head, Christ, for whose sake I will honor him, and do what is pleasing to him.” To the bridegroom Luther likewise says: “In the same way the husband should love his wife from the heart for the sake of the exalted love that he sees in Christ, who gave himself up for us” (“Second Wedding Sermon on Ephesians 5:22–33,” StL 12:2030, §§ 26–27).

215 While it is necessary to maintain the distinction between marriage and the Sacraments instituted by Christ as confessed in Ap 13 (see the discussion above), we can rejoice to find a great measure of exegetical agreement with the following words from Vatican II:

For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. (*Gaudium et spes* [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World], Article 48 [*The Documents of Vatican II* (ed. Walter M. Abbott; New York: Guild, 1966), 251; quoted in Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 337])