

# How Many Ways Can One Say “ONE?”

An Exegesis of  
Ephesians 4:1 to 4:16

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Graceway Community Church  
Middletown, RI  
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## How Many Ways Can One Say ONE?

### Author's Translation

- Eph 4:1 So I, a prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called,
- Eph 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,
- Eph 4:3 being very diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- Eph 4:4 One body and one Spirit, just as you were also called in one hope of your calling.
- Eph 4:5 One Lord, a single faith, a unique baptism.
- Eph 4:6 One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
- Eph 4:7 To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.
- Eph 4:8 Wherefore it says, "When he ascended on high, he took captivity captive; he gave gifts to people."
- Eph 4:9 Now, what is this "he ascended" except that he also descended into the lower part of the earth?
- Eph 4:10 The one who descended, he is the very one who ascended above all the heavens so that he might fill all things.
- Eph 4:11 And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.
- Eph 4:12 For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ
- Eph 4:13 until we all possess the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, one perfect man and the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness.
- Eph 4:14 So that we might no longer be babes tossed by waves and blown about by every wind of teachings in the craftiness of men whose work is a deceitful craftiness.
- Eph 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth, in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head – Christ.
- Eph 4:16 By whom the whole body is being joined and fitted together through the operative power of each of its parts working, in love, to bring about its growth.

Please note v. 5. Just about all English translations will have "One Lord, one faith, one baptism." This is actually the best way to translate this verse. In the Greek, however, there are actually three different words, all of which are best translated as "one." The intention of this translation is to make the fact of Paul's use of slightly different words apparent in English. More will be said about this below.

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“Will Michael Dwight please come forward.’ Hudson Amerding spoke these words with great authority. At that time, he was the president of Wheaton College and then, as now, he had the bearing and manner of a naval officer who had commanded many men in times of great trial. He called the student Michael Dwight (not his real name) to the front of the chapel assembly. This was during an era when bell-bottoms were popular, along with long hair and a certain attitude toward authority. All of these marks of the era were much in evidence in the person of Michael Dwight. He was known as a leader among the malcontents at the college, and when he was called forward by the naval officer turned president, everyone in the chapel auditorium held their breath for whatever fireworks were about to fly. Michael Dwight came forward, and Hudson Amerding addressed him directly, ‘Michael Dwight, I want you to know that you are my brother in Jesus Christ, that I love you, and that I refuse to allow what others may think about our differences to come between us.’ Then the two men separated by so many apparent differences embraced each other.

“Pent-up tension went out of an entire campus like air going out of a balloon. Hundreds still look back on that day as one of the most memorable of their college experience. The embrace of the two different men also remains a picture of what most of us wish the church looked like more often: persons quite different in appearance, demeanor, generation, emphases, attitudes and gifts expressing love for each other – believing and acting as though each had something valuable and precious to contribute to the kingdom of God.”<sup>i</sup>

Bryan Chapell begins his discussion of Eph. 4:1-16 with this story. He uses it to present us a poignant picture that is all too often true of believers. We’ve all been taught the importance of unity and brotherly love. As John tells us:

And now I ask you, dear lady-- not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning-- that we love one another. (2 Jn. 1:5 ESV)

Although we know this truth, we also recognize how poorly we live it out – so much so that a story like this captures our imagination and gives us pause to stop and think. The words and actions of the college president ought to be what we expect; instead they catch us off guard and invoke admiration for him and shame for ourselves.

This fundamental truth about the love we are commanded to have for each other and the unity that it will engender is at the heart of Paul’s message in Eph. 4:1-16. Let’s take a closer look together at what Paul has to say here.

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In the first three chapters of Ephesians Paul has presented much doctrinal material. Notice how chapter three ends with a doxology in vv. 20-21. This serves as a literary sign that Paul is about to move on to a new idea. “The focus shifts from the redemptive act of God the Father in Christ the Son, expounded in Eph 1-3, to an ethical focus on the church and its health and growth in the epistle’s second half. Paul concentrates on how believers **might live into their salvation and their calling to be holy and blameless** (1:4, 4:1),”<sup>ii</sup> (emphasis mine). We find the phrase “in love” three times in Eph. 4:1-16. It appears in v.2, 15 and 16. The use of the phrase at the start of the passage and then again at its end forms an inclusio (a word or phrase used to bracket a passage which expounds a theme). So Paul is giving us a hint that vv. 1-16 are to be understood together – there are one or two underlying ideas that this range of verses is discussing. As we’ll see, unity and how that unity binds believers together who have a diversity of spiritual gifts form the major related themes that Paul discusses here. Paul wants to talk to us about how our faith ought to be lived one day at a time and one relationship at a time.

By making the inclusio with the phrase, “in love”, Paul reminds us of the overriding importance of love in a believer’s life. Love must lie at the root of all that we think and do. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the importance of love until it becomes second nature – until our default reaction to whatever may come our way is to respond and act out of love for God and for one another. Paul shows his love for his Savior by remaining faithful and obedient to the call that Jesus has placed on his life. He allows nothing to deter him from his work for Christ.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.<sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me... (Phil. 1:21-22 ESV)

Before looking at v. 1, Let’s first look at vv. 8-10. Then we’ll use some conclusions drawn from there to help us look at the first three verses of chapter 4. V. 8 opens with the words, “Wherefore it says...” With this phrase Paul tells us that he is about to quote the OT. The particular quotation that Paul cites is from Psa. 68:18

You ascended on high, leading a host of captives in your train and receiving gifts among men, even among the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there. (Ps. 68:18 ESV)

In this verse the phrase "a host of captives" can also be translated as "captivity," which I believe is preferable. The psalmist paints a picture of God’s Messiah triumphantly ascending Mt Zion. As He ascends he leads captivity captive. Before the Messiah’s sacrifice of Himself we were all held captive by sin. The work of the Messiah has put an end to captivity. By doing what He did He freed us from the spiritual captivity in which all mankind was bound. In Christ, then, we are free.

We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.<sup>7</sup> For one who has died has been set free from sin. (Rom. 6:6-7 ESV)

This is a key point that we will refer to when we look at Eph. 4:1-3.

While Eph 4:8 begins the same as Psa. 68:18, it differs in the ending part of the verse. In the Psalm we read how the Messiah receives gifts from men. In Ephesians, we read that the Messiah gives gifts

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to men. In ancient times all the spoils of war would be considered the property of the conquering king or general. Having received all the booty of war, it was then typical for a conqueror to give much of the spoils to his soldiers as a way of rewarding his faithful army for their efforts to overcome the enemy. So the idea of the conqueror giving gifts was not a new or unusual one. The conqueror both received gifts from men and gave gifts to men. The psalm emphasizes the great power of the conqueror by telling us that all the plunder is given to him. Paul emphasizes the tremendous authority and power of the Messiah to give these gifts to His followers.

To summarize then, Paul quotes Psa. 68 to demonstrate that the Messiah, by His tremendous victory has 1) offered all people freedom from sin and 2) gained authority to give gifts to all believers.

As Paul continues in Eph 4:9-10, he now goes on to identify Jesus as the Messiah spoken of in Psa 68:18. To rephrase Paul's question at the start of v. 9 we might say, "When it says 'He ascended', is it not implying that He had previously descended?"

Paul is arguing that the Messiah must have first descended from heaven. If that is not true then the Messiah could not ascend. If the Messiah were never absent from heaven with the Father, then He would have no need to ascend. In fact, He could not ascend any higher than He already was. So Paul is claiming that the fact of the Messiah's ascension is proof of the fact that He must have previously descended.

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (Jn. 3:13 ESV)

The ESV has translated the end of v. 9 as, "the lower regions, the earth." In this way the translation equates the phrase "the lower regions" with "the earth". A more literal translation of the end of this verse is "the lower regions of the earth." There has been much written about this. What exactly did Paul mean by "the lower regions of the earth?" Does the phrase simply mean the earth itself as the ESV implies? Some think the phrase is a reference to hell. They associate this verse with 1Pet 3 and 4.

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,<sup>19</sup> in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, (1 Pet. 3:18-19 ESV)

For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. (1 Pet. 4:6 ESV)

These passages in 1Pet 3 and 4 are problematic. It is very difficult to grasp what Peter is trying to say there. For that reason I think it is wise to not use 1Pet 3 and 4 to try to understand Eph. 4:9. I agree with those who think the best way to understand this is to equate the lower regions with death and burial beneath the earth. With this understanding then, Paul is referring to the one who descended to the earth and suffered death.

"What then did the apostle mean by *the lower parts of the earth*? Some have been led by these words to set this passage alongside 1Peter iii. 18-19 and iv. 6, understood as referring to a descent of Christ after His crucifixion to preach the gospel to those who had died before His coming. The exact meaning of the 1 Peter passages is not certain, but whatever their meaning there seems no reason to

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suppose that there is this kind of reference here to His preaching to the dead. Above the highest heaven He ascended, and He had been to the deepest depths of earth. This may mean simply this earth, so low in comparison with His heavenly home (cf. Is. XLiv. 23); or it may denote the fact that He suffered the greatest humiliation when He endured death itself (cf. Phil. ii. 8), and thus descended to what Scripture sometimes calls ‘the depths of the earth’ (cf. Ps. lxi. 15; Rom. x. 7).”<sup>iii</sup>

As Paul concludes his argument in v. 10 it is clear that he is implying that the one who descended is Jesus, the same one who ascended "far above all the heavens." Paul reaffirms for us that He "fills all things in all." This is yet another way of telling us about Jesus' magnificent victory. By Christ's victory we are truly set free from the consequences of our sin.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (Jn. 8:36 ESV)

Now we are prepared to return to the beginning of the chapter.

Paul begins by saying that he is a (or the) prisoner of Christ. Now, to begin with let's recognize that Paul at the time actually was a prisoner under house arrest in Rome. "Paul encircles the second half of the epistle with references to his chains(4:1; 6:20). He writes this epistle while under house arrest that allows some visitors but restricts his movement and prevents him from preaching in the marketplace (Acts 28:16). Paul awaits an audience with the emperor, who might condemn him to death. For that reason, Paul asks the Ephesians to pray that he would be bold and fearless in preaching the gospel (Eph 6:20).”<sup>iv</sup>

The word for prisoner is *desmios* (δέσμιος). The word is derived from the Greek verb *δεσμεύω* meaning to tie up or to bind. While Paul was Rome's prisoner, note that he does not describe himself that way. Rather Paul says that he is "a prisoner of Christ..." While most if not all English translations have "of Christ," the Greek literally says "in Christ." There is, I think, a nuance here we don't want to overlook. Consider the case where someone joins a branch of the military service – say the army. We can describe that person as now being IN the army. Using the preposition "of" tells us that this person now has some new relationship with the army that they did not have before. When you are "in the army," the implication is that the army now has some authority over you that it did not previously have. When one is in the army, they no longer have the right to choose what line of work they will pursue. The army now has that right. Of course, the army will do best to recognize what kind of training an individual has had before assigning them to a line of work. For example, if a person has been trained as a medical doctor, then the army will do well to assign them to work as a doctor in the service. If a new recruit has no such prior training, then the army does well to test the new recruit to assess what aptitudes and skills they possess and then use that information in determining what kind of work they will do. In any event, the recruit will do as s/he is ordered to do. The new recruit is not required to feed or clothe themselves. The army now has both authority over the recruit and responsibility for many aspects of the new recruit's life that previously were the recruit's responsibilities.

Being "in Christ" is, I think, somewhat similar. As Paul tells us elsewhere (see Rom 12:3-9; 1Cor 7:7) every believer is endowed with some spiritual gift(s) by the Holy Spirit when they become a believer. As we've seen, Jesus has authority to assign gifts to His children. When He does so He equips and enables the believer to do whatever is needed for the work assigned. Consider Moses and the Hebrews that God called out of Egypt as a similar, if not exactly identical, example. I say similar because being called out of Egypt is not technically a spiritual gift. However, God, who alone has authority and ability to do so, commanded Moses and the Hebrews to leave Egypt and go to the

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Promised Land. In doing so, He ordered a huge group of farmers to leave their homes and go where He would lead them. Obviously a group of farmers cannot sustain themselves as they meander around the desert for forty years. Consequently, God took on the responsibility to provide for them in miraculous ways.

And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground.<sup>15</sup> When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. (Exod. 16:14-15 ESV)

The English word "manna" is derived from the Hebrew word for "what is it" – מַן!

And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.<sup>4</sup> Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. (Deut. 8:3-4 ESV)

So we see here the principle in action that "where God guides, He provides." In a similar way, God will provide all that we need to accomplish the work of the gifting that He has given us. He asks us to do the possible and promises that He will do the impossible (Mark 10:27). God always provides all that we need to accomplish the work which He has assigned. In this way God reassures us that we need not fear failure. As we submit ourselves to His authority and obey we can be sure that we will be victorious.

As we saw above in vv. 8-10, He has authority over all creation to gift His followers in whatever way He might choose. (see John 3:35) When Jesus ascended as the triumphant Messiah, He took captivity captive. So when Paul says that he is a prisoner in Christ, he is effectively declaring that he is the prisoner of the one who ended captivity. But if Jesus has put an end to captivity, how can He make Paul His prisoner? The answer is that Christ has not forced Paul to be His captive. Jesus ended captivity. Jesus imprisons no one. If Paul is a prisoner in Christ then he is a prisoner by his own choice. Even his physical captivity to Rome was the result of his choice to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Without saying so in so many words, Paul is declaring that he has made himself Christ's prisoner with the express intent of living out his spiritual gifting as an apostle (Rom 11:13; 1Cor 1:1, 9:1-2; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1Ti 2:7; 2Ti 1:1; Titus 1:1). Paul presents himself as an example of a Christ follower. Paul is giving us an example that every believer should mimic. That truth is that a sincere believer makes him/herself a prisoner of Christ in order to fulfill the role that the Holy Spirit has given.

And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"<sup>29</sup> And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am-- except for these chains." (Acts 26:28-29 ESV)



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Note that in v. 3 we are encouraged “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.” Paul does not say that we are to create this unity ourselves. Rather we are to maintain it. This unity, Paul says, is one that is created by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had prayed that we would united.

And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.  
Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one,  
even as we are one. (Jn. 17:11 ESV)

Jesus then goes on to ask that His prayer would not be just for the disciples but for all believers.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their  
word, (Jn. 17:20 ESV)

Notice also that Eph. 4:3 ends with the phrase “in the bonds of peace.” When we hear the phrase, “in the bonds of ...,” our first thoughts can be quite negative. Bonds are, after all, a means of constraining and limiting the activity of the one bound. But, on further reflection, it seems that we don’t actually always think about bonds in that way. Consider, for example, the phrase “bonds of marriage.” Most marriages begin with people willingly choosing to enter a new life together by being bound to each other. As a person takes this vow, s/he takes comfort in the security of the bond that is being made and the future that it offers. There is hope that each partner can grow individually and for a family that will move forward together. But bonds always constrain. Because of the bonds of marriage, the partners are no longer free to live life completely as individuals or to seek other partners. At first this limitation is happily accepted since neither intends to seek any other partner. But over time, sometimes a relatively short time and sometimes a period of many years, the couple may grow apart. Then the bonds of marriage can feel very different than they did at the start. The bonds of marriage no longer offer hope; rather they bind and bite painfully. The partners no longer think of themselves as partners. One or both may seek to end the marriage and so escape the bonds that once held them together in unity. This pattern of at first accepting bonds and then later rejecting and disowning them is, I’m afraid, typical of many bonds that people make. The same may true for the “bonds of peace” that we took on when we became believers. At first we were amazed and overcome by the joy that we felt when we first surrendered ourselves to the Lord. We probably joined a church and supported it in various ways. But some, over time, can and do come to feel abandoned by the church. Instead of reaffirming the bonds of peace that we took on as we felt the Spirit guiding us to a body of believers, we decide on our own that this church is not for us. If we are wise, we will do what we can to avoid breaking bonds we’ve made. God may in fact move us on from one church to another, but we must pray and seek His leading. We don’t choose a church. God chooses the church for us where we can grow and where we can contribute to the growth of others. It is quite possible, though admittedly not necessary, that the church that the Lord has placed someone into is connected with the spiritual gift that the Spirit has given to him/her. In these verses, Paul is encouraging us to willingly keep the bonds we took on when we became believers. When he describes himself as a prisoner he reminds himself as well as us that he is no longer free to take control over his life. He wants us to do the same. He wants us to remain united with Jesus and, by extension, with one another. For Paul that is the only way forward. He knows that he has to maintain peace and unity to be of use to his Savior. If we are going to live as believers then we, like Paul, must deny ourselves and take up our cross.

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Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.<sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.<sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? (Matt. 16:24-26 ESV)

One last point on v. 3. Note the word “unity” here. The Greek word used here is *ἐνότης* (hen-otes). This particular word is found in the NT in only two verses – both in Eph. 4. It occurs here in v. 4:3 and in v. 4:13. This Greek word is composed of three syllables: *ἐν – ό – τής* (hen – o – tes). The first syllable is a Greek word meaning “one.” The third syllable (tes) is a suffix which carries a particular significance. Greek and English share the property that certain suffixes are associated with particular meanings. In the Greek tes is connected with the idea of transforming an adjective into a noun. English has a similar suffix – ness. So for example if we begin with the English adjective “happy,” we can make it into a noun by adding the suffix “ness” – “happiness.” So happiness then is a noun meaning the state or condition of being happy. Let’s look at another example: righteous. By adding the suffix “ness” we create the word “righteousness.” Righteousness is a noun meaning the state or condition of being righteous. Now look again at the Greek *ἐν – ό – τής*. It begins with a Greek word meaning “one” and ends with the Greek suffix *τής* meaning “ness.” (The *ό* in the middle is a vowel which serves to make the word more easily pronounceable.) So we have, quite literally, “one-ness.”

Continuing on into vv. 4-6, we next encounter what some believe may have been an ancient prayer or hymn. The remarkable thing about these verses is the repetition of the word “one.” It occurs, in English translations, seven times in Eph 4:4-6. While the identical word, “one” is used in English (and correctly so), there is something more going on in the Greek.

In Greek, nouns have gender. Some words have natural gender. So the word for “man” (*ἄνθρωπος*) is masculine. The Greek word for woman (*γυνή*) is feminine. What’s more is that all Greek words have gender whether natural gender exists or not. So the Greek word for eye (*ὀφθαλμός*) is masculine, the Greek for body (*σῶμα*) is neuter, the Greek word for appearance (*μορφή*) is feminine. Since a Greek word has three possible genders, there are three Greek words that must all be translated by the English “one.” These three words are: *εἷς* (heis - masculine), *μία* (mia - feminine) and *ἓν* (hen – neuter).

So why are we bothering to talk about all this Greek grammar detail anyway? Throughout vv. 1-6, Paul is talking about unity (one-ness as we saw above) and diversity. By choosing his vocabulary carefully, Paul repeats the word “one” in a variety of different ways. Throughout vv. 7-16, as we will see, Paul will discuss five different spiritual gifts. While we should all be united in the bonds of peace, we are not all identical. Unity is not uniformity. We may have erroneous ideas about being united. Some may think that being united means that we should be alike in all possible ways. Others may believe that since we are not identical we really cannot have true unity. Paul’s point is that we are, each of us, individually unique and different and at the same time all united in faith and purpose. We are many and we are one. In vv. 1-6 Paul will emphasize our unity – our common ground and our diversity. In the last part of this pericope, vv. 7-16, Paul will discuss some of the diverse gifts that God has given.

Refer to appendix 1 as we look at v. 4-6.

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Look at the pattern in these verses formed by the repeated uses of the word “one.” The first two “ones” are neuter. The third is feminine. Next come three “ones” that follow a masculine, feminine, neuter pattern and finally the seventh and last “one” is masculine. We begin with two uses of the word “one” that are both neuter. This commonality unites the first two ones. The first “one,” the body, is, of course, the church. The word church in the Greek is feminine. Paul chooses to use the word “body” in order to keep the same gender as the Greek word for Spirit. Paul is demonstrating here what he said earlier in v. 3. We, the body, are to keep (not create!) the unity of the Spirit. By placing these two neuter words side by side Paul reminds us that it is the Holy Spirit who is directing the church. If we are to be the church as He intends it then we must be careful to continually seek the Spirit’s guidance. As we saw above, our unity is not of our making. Rather God Himself will guide us and keep us united by His Spirit as we submit ourselves to His leading.

The third “one” occurs at the end of v. 4. The verse ends with the words “just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.” Although the ESV does a good job of smoothing out the translation into English, the wording is a bit awkward in English and I believe it probably seemed awkward to a speaker of Greek as well. In that phrase, Paul makes two references to a call. The first reference is created with a passive verb – you were *called*; the second reference is created with a noun – belongs to your *call*. The phrase seems awkward because of the redundancy. In other words, Paul might have said either a) “just as you were called to one hope” or b) “just as you have the one hope of your call.” By stating this idea in the way he does, Paul draws attention to it. The first two “ones” were about unity. This third “one” is about each believers “call.” Just as there are many believers there are diverse “calls.” The idea here of a “call” is that of a spiritual gift. Each of us is called to use the spiritual gift God has given through the Holy Spirit.

So Paul, in v. 4, has hinted at church unity by saying that there is one body (church) and it is under the direction of one person – the Holy Spirit. Also in v. 4 he has implied a diversity of spiritual gifts. So we see here in this verse the concept of a diversity summed up into a unity. A similar thing happens in the next two verses.

In v. 5 we have three nouns, “Lord”, “faith” and “baptism” all modified by the same word “one.” The “one Lord” is Jesus. In His faithfulness to the Father’s will, He allowed Himself to die as a propitiation for the sin of all mankind. He is the one who establishes our faith and makes it effective.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor. 5:21 ESV)

Without Jesus and the work of His atoning sacrifice, there is no saving “faith”. So here in v. 5 Paul joins the one “Lord”, Jesus, to believers’ “faith” in His work. The last word of the verse is “baptism.” As a believer is baptized, s/he descends under the water as a symbol of dying and being buried with Jesus and then rises up from the water as a symbol of resurrection to a new life in Christ. In baptism a believer publicly expresses his/her faith in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. When someone is baptized that person is identifying with Jesus. The three items taken together paint a picture of God’s salvation that He’d planned from before time began.

knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.<sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the

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foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you<sup>21</sup> who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1 Pet. 1:18-21 ESV)

There is a diversity of three elements mentioned here and the emphasis on diversity is heightened by the change of gender through the list: one Lord (masculine), one faith (feminine) and one baptism (neuter). In v. 5 we see three distinct elements interconnected in the one unique plan of salvation that God had designed before time began. There is a diversity of elements that unite to create the unique salvation plan that God has willed and made real for our sake. There is unity within diversity.

Lastly we come to v. 6 where we find the last of the seven “ones” in vv. 4-6. This section ends by referencing the “one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” As the section ends (remember, it may have been an ancient hymn or prayer) we find that all things are subsumed under the one God and Father – the ultimate unity of everything in Him who is the creator of all things.

There is chiasmus here as well. Consider the overall pattern of the 7 “ones.” We begin with 2 neuter “ones” then 1 feminine “one” then 3 “ones” masculine then feminine then neuter and lastly 1 masculine “one.”

UNITY	2 neuter “ones” expressing the unity of the church under the direction of the one Spirit.
DIVERSITY	A feminine noun referencing the variety of callings or spiritual gifts
DIVERSITY	3 nouns in a masculine, feminine, neuter pattern expressing various elements of God’s salvation plan.
UNITY	One God and Father who unites all things under His sovereign will and command.

Paul now shifts focus to look more closely at spiritual gifting. In these last verses of Eph. 4:1-16, he will discuss primarily five spiritual gifts. Some have referred to these as the “five gifts of leadership.” But all agree that the principles that Paul discusses here are applicable to all spiritual gifts. So even though the particular gift that the Spirit has given you may not be listed here, there is still something for you to glean from these verses.

Let’s continue with v. 7. Here Paul tells us that each of us has received grace “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” There has been much discussion about the meaning of this phrase. Scripture makes clear that there are different gifts of the Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;<sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;<sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.<sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.<sup>8</sup> For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,<sup>10</sup> to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.<sup>11</sup> All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.<sup>12</sup> For just as the body is one and has many members,

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and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. (1 Cor. 12:4-12 ESV)

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,<sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.<sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;<sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;<sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:4-8 ESV)

In both passages, 1Cor 12 and Rom 12, we see again the idea of diversity within an overall unity as we find here in Eph. 4. So the measure of Christ probably has something to do with the particular gift given to a specific individual believer. But there may also be a difference in the amount the gift dispensed. Perhaps this implies that two or three people who all have been given the gift of prophecy do not have the exact same amount or the same use of this gift. So one of them may be used by the Spirit to prophecy more (or maybe in more situations) than another. Perhaps the Spirit may give more than just one gift to someone. (Scripture says that every believer has a spiritual gift but it does not definitively say that every believer is given exactly just one gift.) In such a case might a believer who has been given the gifts of prophecy and hospitality have more hospitality than prophecy? The important point to take away from this is that every believer is given at least one gift. It is very important to see that no one is excluded! Everyone has a role to play. As we live our lives submitting to one another in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit we can know that we are walking in a way that is “worthy of the calling to which we have been called.” (Eph. 4:1)

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"<sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom. 8:15-17 ESV)

We have discussed Eph. 4:8-10 above so we'll recap those verses by saying that there are at least two main ideas there. One is to show the tremendous victory that Jesus has won over Satan and sin. A second major purpose of those verses is to show that, because of His great victory, He now has authority to give gifts to people as He sees fit.

Verse 11 lists four or five “leadership gifts.” The list includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, preachers and teachers. In the Greek each role is preceded by the definite article (the word “the”) except for the last one – teachers. Much ink has been spilled about how best to understand this list – especially how to understand why the last word, teachers, lacks the article. There are several ideas about this.

One idea is that the last item is different from the other four in that it applies to all four.<sup>v</sup> In other words, apostles, evangelists, prophets and pastors are all different from one another in demonstrable ways. While all four are unique, all of them share the requirement to be teachers. Whichever of those four gifts a person may have, s/he needs also to be a teacher in order to effectively communicate what

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the Spirit is gifting them to do and say. To make this idea more clear, here is a translation, admittedly an over-translation, intended to demonstrate this idea more clearly: “some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors, all of whom are teachers as well.” See Appendix II Fig. 1.

Another idea is that the definite articles serve only to separate the gifts in the list. With this understanding each item in the list should be thought about as having no special connection to any other item in the list. Think about a list in English where the items have no implied commonality. Typically, in English, we separate the various items from one another by placing a comma between them. We would not place a comma before the last item but we would use the word “and” instead. So for example if I were to write my grocery list, I might write, “I need to buy milk, eggs, bread, flour, tomatoes and hamburger.” Since ancient Greek had no punctuation marks, the writer has placed the definite article as a separator between the items in the list similar to a comma in English and he has left it out before the last item and instead used the word “and” to mark the end of the list. See Appendix II Fig. 2.

Yet another view on how to translate this verse focuses on the last two items in the list – pastors and teachers. This may be the most defensible approach because much is known about Greek grammar in the case where there are two nouns (or substantives) joined by the word “and” (*καί*) and only the first noun has the definite article. In his grammar book, Wallace essentially says that in Eph 4:11 the fact that “pastors” has the definite article and “teachers” does not means that pastors are a subset of the second item, teachers.<sup>vi</sup> If this is correct then it means that all pastors are also teachers but there are also some people who are gifted only as teachers. Again over-translating to try to get this idea across, “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers and teachers.” Said another way: every pastor is also a teacher, however, not all teachers are pastors. See Appendix II Fig. 3.

The issue about understanding this list is not at all trivial and it is difficult to be completely definitive.

Before looking at the individual gifts, we need to remember that “Paul urges us *not to despise others’ gifts* (cf. 1Cor 12:21-26). A good deal of life’s contentment comes from the realization that God did not intend everyone to be just like me. The world is richer and better because of the variety of persons, and the church is stronger because of the variety of persons Christ has gifted by his authority, out of his generosity, and for his purposes. Some time ago, I listened to some sermon tapes of one of the great preachers of the middle of the last century. His voice was raspy, his manner was harsh, his exegesis was simplistic if not flawed, and yet God greatly used him.”<sup>vii</sup> Chapell goes on to note that a good leader is one who makes him/herself unnecessary. “We who are leaders have the important job of making ourselves nonessential for the doing of all the church’s ministries because we are to be so equipping others that their efforts will not be dependent on us. Our essential task is to equip others for the ministry of the church. This is an important educational concept for the church that often will expect the minister or paid staff or session to do everything (and we can feed that expectation by trying to do everything). Yet if we make ourselves essential to every project and activity, then the church can never do more than the leadership can stretch itself to do. Christ’s goal is that the church leaders would prepare others for ministry by equipping every person to do his or her part.”<sup>viii</sup> “The task of ministers is the restoration, training, and discipline of all members of the *ekklesia*. They are to equip the saints for fulfilling their commission: to make known the divine multicolored Wisdom-Sophia to the powers of the cosmos (3:10). Such ministers are equipped to train the saints for the work of service (*διακονία*) that builds up the body of Christ. While we today assume that the work of ministry is done by ordained ministers, Ephesians insists that this is the work of the ‘saints’.”<sup>ix</sup>

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We need to differentiate between a gift and an office. Importantly, we need to emphasize that a gift is not an office. “It is true that those who have offices will have gifts because all believers have gifts. However, the opposite is not true, that is, a gifted person may not have an office since only a handful of people will occupy the offices of elder and/or deacon. Maintaining the distinction of the gifts and offices would help to avoid much confusion.”<sup>x</sup>

The first in the list of gifts is apostles. “The ‘apostles’ he mentions here likely extend beyond the Twelve and Paul to include other whom the Lord Jesus has called to go, establish churches, and ground these new believers in the common faith. Their authority would be differentiated from the Twelve and Paul, who had ‘seen the Lord’ (1 Cor 9:1; Acts 1:21-22). Nevertheless, they are authorized by the risen Lord Jesus himself, who has called them to this role, and by the authoritative message of the gospel itself, which they impart. Their function is closely tied up with their name, ‘one who is sent.’”<sup>xi</sup> “It seems then that the main function of an apostle is to establish churches in areas that have not been reached by others (Rom 15:20). They are God’s messengers to open up new territories for Christ.”<sup>xii</sup>

Baugh notes that in the Greek the first item in the list, apostles, rhymes with the last, teachers. Also, the middle three, evangelists, prophets and pastors rhyme. “One nice thing about this sequence that would not be lost on the audience is the rhyming of the final syllables of the titles of office, with the first and last forming an inclusio... This is not accidental but part of nice, if not extravagant, compositional care, marking Ephesians and many parts of Paul’s writings.”<sup>xiii</sup>

“The prophet is listed among the foundational gifted persons who prepare saints for ministry and build up this new body, the church, revealed from the mystery. In many ways the prophet and apostle had similar functions for they were both involved in revelation. They had overlapping functions, much like many ministries today, but their emphases differed. The emphasis for the apostle was more on the divine commission to a specific task of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and the building up of churches, whereas for the prophet it was the communication of divine revelation.”<sup>xiv</sup>

Hoehner goes on to say that “In the early church it was thought that the evangelists were those who preached the gospel and were the successors to the apostles in that they laid the foundations of the faith in new areas.”<sup>xv</sup>

The Greek word translated here as pastor is ποιμήν. The word also means “shepherd.” So a pastor is one who is gifted to shepherd God’s people. “In the present context the term is best translated as ‘pastor,’ one who cares for his or her flock as a shepherd cares for his or her sheep. This would include ministering to troubled saints, exhorting and comforting all believers, and administering the activities in the local assembly. Again, a caution must be made that the term refers to the use of the gift. Therefore, it describes a function with no hint of reference to an office.”<sup>xvi</sup>

Teaching is “depicted instruction, not only in factual matters and skills but most likely also in moral evaluation.”<sup>xvii</sup> Jesus taught with authority. “Likewise, teaching in the local assembly should have authority when based on the Scriptures. Teachers should not be like the scribes who propounded a variety of views but never came to any conclusion. Rather, they should teach the revelation of God authoritatively.”<sup>xviii</sup>

And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. (Mk. 1:22 ESV)

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As we move on to v. 12, Paul explains the purpose behind these gifts. He says it is **for** the equipping of the saints **for** the work of ministry and **for** the building up of the saints. Note that the three occurrences of the word “for” are in bold. The first of these three, in the Greek, is *πρὸς*. The last two are the Greek word *εἰς*. So the question arises why has Paul chosen to use two different words? There are two major views. The first view claims that the change in preposition indicates that the last two clauses are meant to modify the first.<sup>xix</sup> The second view says that all three clauses are independent of each other.<sup>xx</sup>

Last two modify the first:

- for the equipping of the saints
  - for the work of ministry
  - for the building up of the saints

All three are independent

- for the equipping of the saints
- for the work of ministry
- for the building up of the saints

With the first view, the work of ministry and the building up of the saints are two ways of equipping the saints. Equipping the saints is the purpose of the five gifts. In the second view, the purpose of the gifts is threefold, a) to equip the saints, b) to enable the work of ministry and c) to build up the saints. The first view seems to better explain Paul’s meaning. God has gifted leaders for the primary purpose of equipping the saints (the church). What is the work of the saints; why do they need to be equipped? Paul’s answer is that it consists of two parts. So leaders work to provide all that the saints might need in order to a) spread the gospel message and b) support one another as we all continue on the path where God is leading us individually and corporately. In the first scenario, the focus may be a bit more on the individual. The leaders are building the individual up to help him/her to use their spiritual gift in their own personal ministry. In the second scenario, the focus is more on the church family. The leaders are building the individual up to help him/her to use their spiritual gift in support of fellow believers. God provides leadership to His church to support its unity in the bonds of love – love for a lost world and love for one another.

In Eph. 4:13 Paul points out the end goal of the leadership gifts – to help all believers obtain and hold fast to unity (*ἐνότης*). Unity with respect to a) the faith and b) the knowledge of the Son of God. The word in the Greek for man in v. 13 is *aner* (*άνήρ*), which is the word for a “male person” as opposed to *anthropos* (*άνθρωπος*) which is more accurately translated as a “human being”. So who is this man, this perfect or complete man, that Paul is referring to? Of course it is Jesus Himself. The work of those who have the gifts of leadership is to continue until the church has a perfect unity and a perfect knowledge of the fullness of Christ. Notice the phrase that Paul uses at the end of the verse. The phrase is describing the “perfect man.” Paul says that the goal is that all may have knowledge of the perfect man, knowledge of the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This is no mere passing acknowledgment of Jesus. This is a deep and abiding understanding of all He is and all He has done.

In to v. 14, Paul now goes on to describe the situation that leaders are working to prevent. Paul says that we should no longer be like babies in the faith tossed about by waves on the sea or blown about by every wind of “teaching in the craftiness of men.” When he talks about teaching in craftiness



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he is acknowledging that just as God has provided people to accurately teach His word, so Satan uses evil people to teach false doctrine attempting to deceive as many as possible. No counterfeiter would ever try to make a three dollar bill. Since there is no such thing as a genuine three dollar bill a counterfeit would be worthless. For a counterfeit to be of use to a thief there must be something genuine that the counterfeit is trying to falsely copy. I remember a sermon where the pastor talked about false teaching having “the skin of a truth, stuffed with a lie.” There is something that has the appearance of being true and good but that is essentially false and destructive. So those gifted as teachers need to present consistent teachings about all of scripture. It is extremely valuable for them to relate scripture to other scripture so the truth of what they are teaching can be verified. No false doctrine will stand up under intense investigation into the Word. This process takes time. We need to be patient as we grow in our understanding of God’s word. If we try to take shortcuts, we open ourselves up to the possibility of error. That can be costly for us and for those who hear us. Just as a plant watched from day to day does not seem to be growing at all, yet over time its growth into maturity becomes obvious and beautiful. So it is with God’s word. As we strive to accurately learn His word, we slowly grow and build up a body of good knowledge that will benefit ourselves and our hearers. As Eph 4:15 declares, “as we speak the truth in love, let us grow up in all ways into Him who is the head – Christ.”

Paul closes this section of Ephesians by reminding us that it is Christ who is working through each individual to bring about the growth and spiritual health of the church.

“*From Christ alone, as Head, the body derives its whole capacity for growth and activity, and its direction as one coordinated, directed entity.*”<sup>xxi</sup>

“... as the apostle turns from the consideration of the members and the connection between them, to the *effectual working* of the whole. Each part, in its *measure* and according to its need, must have this functioning that is made possible by the ‘energizing’ of God in the whole. Then yet again the purpose of growth is mentioned, and it is made clear that each member does not seek its own growth, but that of *the body* as a whole. We may translate, as RV (Revised Version) does, ‘building up’, but the context makes clear that it is not increase in size of the church that is primarily in view, by members being added to it, but spiritual increase. And this increase is above all *in love*. Then without doubt, if there is a fellowship living in love and showing the truth in love, the numerical increase will follow.”<sup>xxii</sup>

## Appendix 1

v. 4    one body  
Ἐν σῶμα  
(neuter)

one Spirit  
ἐν πνεῦμα  
(neuter)

one hope  
μὴ ἐλπίδι  
(feminine)

v. 5    one Lord  
εἷς κύριος  
(masculine)

one faith  
μία πίστις  
(feminine)

one baptism  
ἐν βάπτισμα  
(neuter)

v. 6

one God  
εἷς θεός  
(masculine)

## Appendix II

Fig. 1

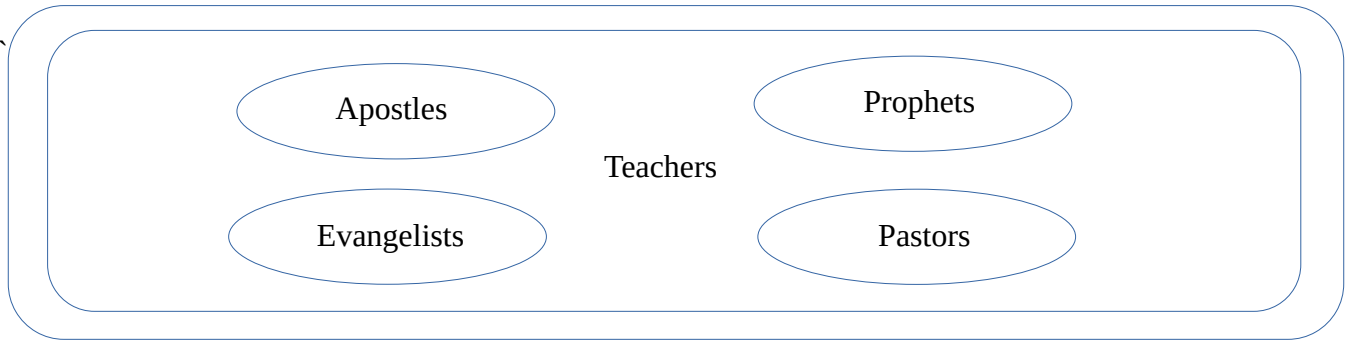


Fig. 2

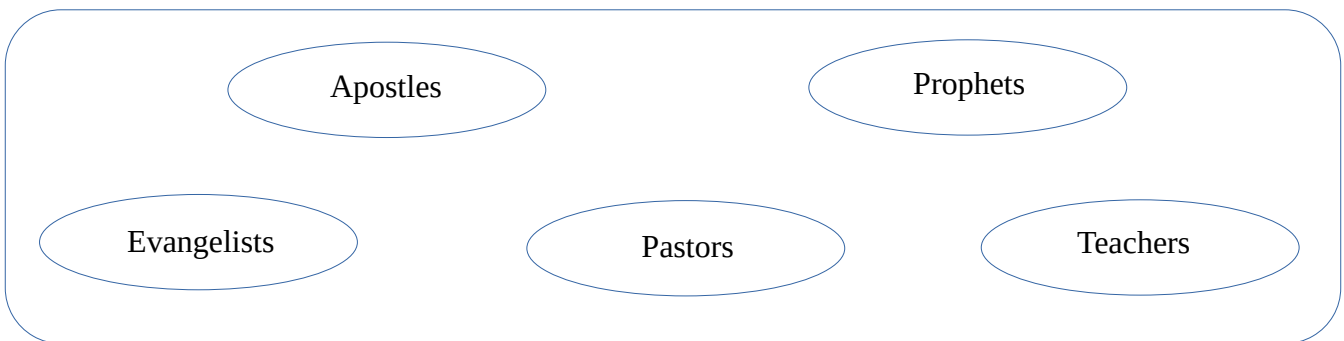
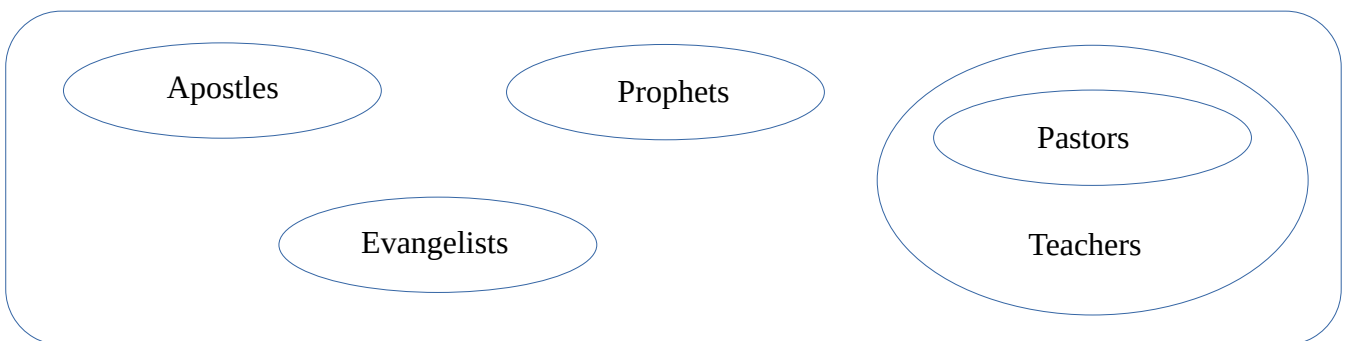


Fig. 3



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xiii	Baugh 2016, 332
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