BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST: DIVINE EMBODIMENT AS THE CALLING OF THE CHURCH IN THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

by

Richard F. Gamble, B.A.

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To my parents, Robert and Melissa Gamble, who have constantly embodied God’s character and love to those around them, and, particularly, to me.

And in memory of Jack Arthur (1926-2017), co-founder with his beloved wife, Kay, of Precept Ministries International, which established me in God’s Word and where the idea for this thesis was born.
This study concerns the interpretation of the phrase τῆς κλήσεως ἡ ἑκλήθητε in Ephesians 4:1 and its relevance for the interpretation of Ephesians as a whole. Scholars have often divided Paul’s letter to the Ephesians into two main sections. First, chapters 1—3 have been loosely called the “theological” section in which Paul lays out his doctrinal positions. And, second, chapters 4—6 have been referred to as the “ethical” section in which Paul gives his readers moral instruction. Based on this scholarly consensus, 4:1, being directly at the halfway point, has often been characterized as the connecting thought between the two halves of the book. In this verse, Paul instructs the Ephesians to live their lives in accordance with τῆς κλήσεως ἡ ἑκλήθητε ("the calling to which you have been called"). The question immediately rising from a reading of this text is “what is meant here by the term, ‘calling’?” The “therefore” (οὖν) at the beginning of the verse indicates that the ethical urging has its foundation in what has preceded it, namely, chapters 1—3. But the author has stated multiple truths about the Church in the first three chapters of Ephesians. So, what amidst all of these statements in 1—3 is the calling of the church that Paul mentions in 4:1?

In answer to this problem, this study concludes with the thesis that, in Ephesians, the church’s calling is a vocational call to embody (i.e. represent physically) God’s character and purposes in the world. In proving this thesis, it, first, shows how the use of κλήσις, κλήσεως ἡ in its Jewish, Greco-Roman, and New Testament contexts supports the conclusion. Second, the study engages exegetically with Paul’s flow of thought in Ephesians 1—3 to show how the thesis is derived naturally from the theology therein. Third, it systematically explains how the thesis best explains Paul’s specific choice of moral admonitions in Ephesians 4—6. Fourth, and finally, it applies the thesis to Christian thought and life, and makes suggestions for further study in the field of New Testament studies.
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Introduction

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul’s main challenge and aim was to draw his readers out of any sense of self-preoccupation by focusing their minds on two central ideas:

(i) The awesome narrative of God’s victory through Christ over “the powers that have hijacked God’s world holding it captive and enslaving humanity,”

(ii) The grand vision of the church’s role within this narrative.

In this study, I will undertake a fresh interpretation of the second of these two ideas, the calling of the church as presented in Ephesians. Particularly, I will focus on the interpretation of the phrase, τῆς κλήσεως ἦς ἐκλήθητε in Ephesians 4:1 and how, when correctly understood, it connects and permeates the so-called “theological” (chapters 1—3) and “paraenetic” (chapters 4—6) sections of the letter. I will argue that Paul’s message in Ephesians is best understood if τῆς κλήσεως ἦς ἐκλήθητε is interpreted as a vocational call for the church to embody the character and activity of the victorious God in the world. By using the phrase, “to embody,” I mean that the church is called to give “material” form to God’s character and actions.

1 Timothy G. Gombis, The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010), 9. Gombis suggests that we should read Ephesians as a dramatic narrative that presents God as victorious over the evil powers. He goes to great lengths to describe the Jewish background to these evil cosmic powers. According to him, the early Jewish conception of the cosmos was “dominated by suprahuman cosmic figures—led by a singular personal figure of evil—who rule the nations and who were originally appointed by God to rule with justice, upholding God’s shalom. They have rebelled and now enslave the nations by orienting life on earth so that it is idolatrous and self-destructive, They pervert creation so that human life is characterized by greed, inordinate sensual lust and over-powering selfish ambition leading to self-destructive exploitation, manipulation and injustice” [Ibid., 36].


3 The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (5th ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 811., defines the verb as “to give material or corporeal character to what is spiritual” and “to give a material or discernible form to
Functioning as God’s physical representative, she is to act in the same way that God would act in any given situation and, thereby, be the agent of God’s continuing redemptive work in the world. Before proceeding to defend this thesis in the body of my paper, I will present, in the rest of this introduction, the problem that this study seeks to solve, its methodology, and its presuppositions.

The Problem: The Relationship between Ephesians’ Two Halves

Concerning the overall structure of Ephesians, most contemporary commentators have argued that the letter can be divided into two halves. Chapters 1—3 comprise the “theological” portion, in which Paul lays out his doctrine. Chapters 4—6 make up the “paraenetic” or “ethical” section in which Paul instructs his readers on proper Christian conduct. On the basis of this

an abstract principle, concept, thing, or person.” The meaning that I am proposing is a combination of these two definitions. The church is representing God (a spiritual person) in a material or corporeal way.


There is another group of scholars who argue that while the thematic distinction between the two halves is legitimate, they do not believe that it is as clear-cut as the group above. For example, Stephen Fowl [Ephesians: Being a Christian, at Home and in the Cosmos (Phoenix Guides to the New Testament; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 10] states that one can “make too much” of this distinction and argues that “there are, for example several significant passages in Ephesians 4—6 with doctrinal material (e.g. 4:4–6, 21–22), and several moral admonitions in Ephesians 1—3 (e.g. 2:10–11; 3:13):” C.f. Markus Barth, Ephesians I—3 (Anchor Bible 34; New York: Doubleday, 1974), 54-56; Francis Foukes, The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians (Tyndale New Testament Commentary 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1979), 13-14; William W. Klein, Ephesians (Expositors Bible Commentary 12; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 33; Larry Kreitzer, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth Press, 1997), 118; Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians (Word Biblical Commentary 42; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), xxxvi; John Muddiman, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Blackwell New Testament Commentary; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2001), 177; Peter T. O’Brien, The Letter to the Ephesians (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdman, 1999), 66-67; Klyne Snodgrass, Ephesians (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 33; Charles H. Talbert. Ephesians and Colossians (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 107; Frank Thielman, Ephesians (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 28-29.
scholarly *distinction* between 1—3 and 4—6, it needs to be asked whether or not there is any *connection* between the two. There is somewhat a consensus among contemporary scholars that the ethics given in 4—6 illustrate how the theology of 1—3 “translates into the conduct of believers.”5 The impetus for this consensus comes from the language of Ephesians 4:1, which is believed to function as the connecting verse between the two halves. In this verse, Paul states, παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ ὁ δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως περιπατήσαι τῆς κλήσεως ἦς ἐκλήθητε (“I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”).6 The οὖν at the beginning of the verse is a transitional conjunction normally translated as “therefore” and, according to Danker, et al., “what it [οὖν] introduces is the result of or an inference from what precedes.”7 Because of this, the standard interpretation of 4:1 is that the church’s way of life (or “walk,” περιπατέω), which Paul is beginning to describe in 4—6, has its foundation in the “calling” (τῆς κλήσεως) that he has laid out for them in the theology of 1—3.8 If one holds to this view, the interpretation of “calling” in 4:1 holds great importance for how one interprets the entire epistle.9 Curiously, among contemporary

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6 All translations of the Greek text are the author’s unless otherwise specified.


8 E.g. Schnackenburg [*Ephesians*, 161-62], in his classical ecumenical commentary on Ephesians, states, “The paraclesis flows of necessity from the Gospel of Grace as is clear from the οὖν in Romans 12:1. In Ephesians 4:1, too, it extracts the consequence for a Christian way of life from all that has already been said about God’s work of salvation.” C.f. Best, *Ephesians*, 359-60; O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 274; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 251.

9 The point needs to be made that not every Ephesians scholar believes that the exhortations in 4—6 are founded in the argument in 1—3. In fact, there is an entire group in scholarship that believes 4—6 is largely unrelated to the rest of the letter [e.g. Kreitzer, *Ephesians*, 118]. For an excellent survey of the scholars who hold to
scholarship, there is not a standard interpretation of “calling” in Ephesians. Rather, I submit that there are four main, scholarly approaches to understanding this issue, to which I will now list and respond to in turn.

The first group of scholars interpret the “calling” as God’s salvific call for people to become Christians, connecting it to the doctrine of God’s election of people in eternity past and actualizing this eternal election in time. On this view, then, since the readers have been saved by grace and have become Christians, Paul, in 4:1, is urging them to live like Christians and lists how they should go about this in the remaining chapters of the book. I submit that interpreting the “calling” as salvation in general is inadequate because it cannot account for the specific moral commands that Paul gives in the subsequent chapters. Surely, there are many ethical implications that accompany salvation, so, on this view, why did Paul chose the specific

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commands that he did and not others? It seems that if we agree with this first group, then we must believe that the apostle simply was arbitrary in this matter, which is not preferable.\[11\]

The second group of scholars argue that the "calling," instead of broadly referring to salvation, refers to the entirety of the claims Paul made in 1—3 concerning the identity of the believing community in Christ. On this view, then, there are multiple "callings" in 1—3 to which the readers’ lives must measure up,[ e.g. the blessings and hope of salvation (1:3–14, 18); union with Christ in his exaltation and dominion (2:20–22; 2:6); membership in God’s household (2:15, 19); etc.].\[12\] While I appreciate the scholars in this view for wanting to connect the "calling" to more than just salvation in general, I think that this view fails because it does not make sense of the singular definite article (τῆς) that appears before "calling" in 4:1. This article implies that there is only one "calling," not many to which the believers have been called. If this view were correct, then what Paul should have said was, “I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the callings (plural) to which you have been called.” Since this is not the case, then there must be a singular interpretation of "calling" that encompasses all of Paul’s identity claims in 1—3.

The third group of scholars simply view the "calling" as a vocational calling to live out the unity and holiness described in the rest of 4—6. On this view, the Ephesians have been called

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\[11\] A proponent of this view could argue that the specific moral commands reflect what Paul believes to be flaws in the reading community, which he believes is preventing them from living as Christians and is addressing in his moral commands (similar to what he does in 1 Cor.). According to Fowl [Ephesians, 11], however, this type of "mirror-reading" is rarely justified, so, for example, “the emphasis on unity in Ephesians 4:1–6 is not a reason for assuming that the Church was characterized by disunity.” Therefore, I submit that the specific commands must each have a connection to the "calling" in 4:1, which must be more specific that salvation in general. C.f. Hans-Josef Klauck, Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 317.

to live as saints (holym ones) in the world. While I agree that the “calling” in 4:1 is vocational, I do not think that it can be equated with following the moral commands in 4—6, as these authors suggest. If this was the case, then chapters 1—3 would not be necessary as the foundation of the moral commands, a claim which these authors themselves deny. The “calling” must have been defined already in 1—3 and the moral commands in 4—6 show the church how to live it out.

Finally, the fourth group of scholars also interpret the “calling” as vocational, but instead of identifying the vocation with holy living (as the third group does), they argue that the church, as the new humanity of God, has been tasked with taking part in the fulfillment of God’s cosmic purposes. I believe that this view is largely correct. Chapters 1—3 cast a grand vision of God’s cosmic purposes and reveal that they will be at least partly fulfilled through the new humanity, the church, that he has created in Christ. Therefore, the church must live in a way that accomplishes her role in this divine plan. The next logical question to ask these scholars is “How do you, then, describe the role of the church?” It may seem puzzling, but these scholars, fail to answer this question. They merely assert that the Church has a role without saying what it is. So, while being correct on the nature of the church’s calling, they have failed to identify the specifics of it.

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14 Lincoln, Ephesians, 235. C.f. Barth, Ephesians, 454; Gombis, Drama, 137.

15 The one exception among this group is Timothy Gombis [Drama, 138], with whom I am in large agreement. In his dramatic and theological reading, Gombis claims that Paul has described the specifics of the “calling” at the end of chapters 2 and 3. He submits that God has established the church as a “monument to his triumph over the powers of darkness” The church’s calling, then, as a community of believers is to “manifest God’s triumph in the world, just as Paul did during his life and ministry.” This seems to make sense of the architectural language present at the end of chapter 2 when Paul states that the Church is growing into a “holy temple in the Lord” (2:21–22). But how does his claim make sense of the Church being identified as a living “body” and a “new man” in these same chapters (2:15–16; 3:6)? Surely, if the Church is described as a body and a new man, then the Church must be described primarily as alive and animated, not as a monument. Gombis recognizes this need and
Due to the inadequacy of these arguments concerning the meaning of “calling” in Ephesians 4:1 and how it connects the two sections of the book, it is necessary to produce a fresh interpretation that identifies the specific calling of the church, emerges directly from the theology of 1—3, best explains Paul’s selection of ethical imperatives in 4—6, and is consistent with Paul’s theology in his other letters. As stated above, I submit that the best interpretation of the “calling” in 4:1 is that the church has been tasked with divine embodiment. In the rest of this study, I intend to show how this interpretation fulfills each of these requirements and provides stimulating application for the thought and life of the contemporary church as well.

Methodology and Presuppositions

The following is an outline of my argument and method. In chapter 1, I will provide a detailed word study on κλήσις, κλήσεως ή in its Jewish, Greco-Roman, New Testament, and Pauline contexts. In chapter 2, I will show how my interpretation of “calling” in 4:1 naturally flows out of Paul’s message in chapters 1—3 by tracing the divine embodiment theme that is present in these chapters. In chapter 3, I will show how my interpretation makes the most sense out of the specific moral commands in 4—6 by showing how each exhortation is founded in the divine embodiment theme of 1—3. I will end both chapters 2 and 3 with theological analyses that summarize my findings and relate them to Paul’s theology in his so-called “undisputed letters.” Finally, I will conclude by summarizing my argument and describing its theoretical and

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states that the Church, as described in Ephesians, is also a “living organism,” which description points to the need for continual transformation and growth in the life of the community.” The problem with this statement, however, is that it is not connected explicitly to the “body” language in Ephesians 1—3. Rather, Gombis’ focus is on Paul’s description of the church as a temple. This focus leads him to describe the church primarily as an inanimate object, such as a “symbol,” a “monument,” or an “arena,” that only secondarily functions as a living body. I submit that this understanding thinks backwards. A more holistic reading of 1—3 recognizes the church primarily as a living body, which secondarily functions as a monument, symbol, and arena, not the other way around. Thus, I do not believe that Gombis’ argument adequately specifies the church’s calling.
practical implications for further study in the spheres of New Testament studies, Systematic Theology, and Christian praxis.

Before I begin my exegesis of Ephesians, allow me to state two presuppositions upon which it will stand. First, I am presupposing that Ephesians is an authentically Pauline letter. The letter itself claims to be written by Paul (Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ 1:1) and as early as Irenaeus (130-200 CE), the authorship of Ephesians was attributed to Paul (Adversus Haereses 5.2.3). But ever since Erasmus in the sixteenth century, the idea has been put forward that Ephesians could be a pseudonymous work, and continuing through the twentieth century, arguments against the Pauline authorship of Ephesians increased.16 And, currently in the twenty-first century, according to Harold Hoehner, a slight majority of scholars regard the letter as pseudonymous.17 So, why do I stand in the minority? Space does not permit a full defense of Pauline authorship,18 so let me just say that I do not hold Pauline authorship because of some

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16 Raymond E. Brown, An Introduction to the New Testament (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 620. A good summary of the arguments against Pauline authorship can be found in Lincoln, Ephesians, lxxi-lxxiii. First, he claims that the point of view of the author, particularly in 3:1–13, seems more like a later follower of Paul who is trying to boost his claims for authority (e.g. 3:4) than that of Paul himself. Second, he argues that there are theological differences between Ephesians and the undisputed letters. For example, in the undisputed letters, the term ἐκκλησία usually is reserved for the local assembly of believers; instead, Ephesians uses the term for the universal church. Third, he claims that Ephesians exhibits “significant differences in language and style” when compared with the undisputed letters. For example, Ephesians contains 40 hapax legomena for the NT and 51 words not found in the undisputed letters. Fourth, he claims that Ephesians used Colossians as a model and significantly borrowed language and theology from the letter. If this is the case, then it seems as though Ephesians would have to be written too late to be written by Paul himself.

17 Hoehner, Ephesians, 9-20. In this section, Hoehner systematically lists the views on authorship of every major commentator since Erasmus and, in the 20th century, the highest percentage of those against Pauline authorship was 58 percent (1981-1990). In 2001, the time of his writing, he stated that the debate stood dead even at 50 percent on both sides.

18 Two excellent, and extensive, defenses, which I recommend reading, have been made by John McRay [Paul: His Life and Teaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 334-51] and Hoehner, Ephesians, 2-61. Against the argument that Ephesians used Colossians, see Ernest Best, “Who Used Whom? The Relationship of Ephesians and Colossians,” New Testament Studies 43 (1997): 72-96. Best submits that “there are a number of passages which look alike in translation but are much less alike in Greek because synonyms or verbal equivalents have been used. The words for vigilance are different in the apparently similar passages of Col. 4:2 and Eph. 6:18, for the provocation of children in Col. 3:21 and Eph. 6:4, for the description of good conduct on the part of children in Col. 3:20 and Eph. 6:1, for revelation in Col. 1:26 and Eph. 3:5, for newness in Eph. 2:24 and Col. 3:10, for sin in Eph. 1:7 and Col. 1:14, for putting off the old person in Eph. 4:22 and Col 3:9. Assuming the dependence of one
evangelical loyalty but, instead, I believe that most of the arguments against Pauline authorship, while seeming to carry weight when viewed as a whole, when analyzed point by point, break down because they are made on the basis of faulty presuppositions.19

My second presupposition is that Ephesians was a circular letter distributed to multiple churches in Asia Minor. This position goes against the majority manuscript reading of 1:1b, τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Ἐφεσῳ καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, which most English translations adopt (e.g. NASB, ESV, NRSV).20 On this reading, the recipients are clearly “the saints in Ephesus.” The problem with this reading, however, is that the phrase, ἐν Ἐφεσῳ, is omitted in the earliest extant manuscripts of the letter.21 So which tradition is preferable? I side with Charles Talbert who argues that since the letter itself states that the readers had only heard of Paul (3:2) and that Paul had no firsthand knowledge of the readers (4:21), this makes it difficult for seeing the letter being addressed specifically to the Ephesians “where Paul was known and where he knew the

19 For example, against Lincoln’s first argument that the author’s statements about himself seem like a later writer trying boost his authority, Lincoln is presupposing that Paul would have had no reason to try to boost his authority through lofty claims about his apostleship. But this is overlooking the condition in which the author claims to be, “I Paul am a prisoner for Christ” (3:1 emphasis added). Gombis helpfully points out that “being a prisoner in the first century was intensely dishonorable and shameful” and that “Paul is keenly aware that it sounds jarringly inconsistent to rehearse the victories of God in Christ over the fallen powers and then identify himself as someone who is not exactly benefiting from that victory” [Drama, 109-10] If it was the case that Paul wrote Ephesians while in a dishonorable position in prison, then it makes perfect sense for him to claim authority for his apostleship and show how even his imprisonment is a part of God’s plan.

20 This reading can be found in manuscripts in the Alexandrian, Byzantine, and Western traditions: A, B, D, F, G, K, L, P, 33, 81, 1175, 1881, 104.

21 The earliest manuscript we have is P46, which is from the third century, and the early Alexandrian manuscripts Π, B, 1739, 6, and 424c. This is more complicated by the mixed witness of the early church fathers on the issue. Both Origen and Basil (Adversus Eunomium 2.19) claim that the phrase was omitted from the oldest manuscripts of which they knew. But Clement of Alexandria (Stromata 4.8), Tertullian (Adversus Marcionem 5.11.12), and Ireneaus (Adversus Haereses 5.2.3), who is a contemporary with the oldest manuscript that omits the phrase (P46), all refer to the letter as being addressed to the Ephesians.
church.” He claims that it is easier to explain why ἐν Ἐφέσῳ would have been added than why it might have been omitted. A scenario he puts forward as a plausible explanation is that the letter could have “been written by Paul from Rome to Ephesus, to be disseminated from there.”

A copy was left in the Ephesians’ church archives. When Paul’s letters were collected, the letter’s association with Ephesus led to the belief that it was written to the Ephesians. While there is no manuscript evidence that states explicitly that Ephesians was a circular letter, we know that circular letters sent to multiple churches was a common early Christian phenomenon (e.g. Acts 15:23; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1–2; Rev. 1:4), so if ἐν Ἐφέσῳ was a later addition, then it

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22 Talbert, Ephesians and Colossians, 33. Contra Talbert, Clinton Arnold [Ephesians (Zondervan Illustrated Biblical Backgrounds Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 7] argues that we should side with the majority of manuscript and translation witnesses and continue to read ἐν Ἐφέσῳ in 1:1b. He claims that there is good reason for a scribe to have omitted the phrase early on, “The contents of Ephesians are especially well-suited to a broad readership. It is likely that a scribe deliberately omitted “in Ephesus” for the purpose of the public reading of Scripture in another location (i.e. in Egypt).” He states that a similar omission, likely for the same reason, occurs in Romans 1:7, where several manuscripts omit “in Rome.” While Arnold’s argument seems plausible, I believe it is begging the question as to why the letter is so “well-suited to a broad readership,” as he suggests. When Paul was writing to a specific congregation, he normally addressed specific problems in the church (e.g. 1 Cor.) and wrote in a more personal tone and greeted specific people (e.g. Col.). In Ephesians, however, the only person Paul greets is Tychicus (6:21), the tone is much more formal, and no specific problems are combatted. I submit that the general content of the letter points to it being a circular letter intended to be distributed in the churches in Asia minor.

Based on the epideictic rhetorical characteristics in Ephesians, many scholars have argued that the book is a circular homily with the epistolary introduction and conclusion attached. For examples of this view see: Best, Ephesians, 62; Lincoln, Ephesians, xli; Jeal, Theology and Ethics, 28; Witherington III, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians, 215-19. I believe that this argument has much in its favor and I think that these scholars are correct to urge us to focus on the rhetorical nature within exegesis. Since, however, the form of the book as it now exists is in the form of a letter, I am comfortable still calling it a letter.

In describing Asia Minor, Paul Trebilco [“The Province and Cities of Asia,” in The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 501-21] states, “The Roman province of Asia extended along the western coast of the Anatolian Peninsula, now modern Turkey, from the Propontis in the north to the Mediterranean in the South. In the time of Paul, the province of Asia incorporated the areas of Mysia, the Troad, Aeolis, Ionia, the coastal Islands, Lydia, Caria, western Phrygia, and Cibyra” (p. 501). The main cities he lists that were within this province were, Assos, Colossae, Ephesus, Hierapolis, Laodicea, Miletus, Patmos, Pergamum, Philadelphia, Sardis, Smyrna, Thyatira, and Troas. C.f. J. A. Harrill, “Asia Minor” Pages 130-36 in IVP Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds (Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter eds.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 130-36.

23 According to L. M. McDonald [“Ephesus,” in IVP Dictionary of New Testament Background (Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter eds.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 320], “it is likely that Ephesus was the center for Christian missionary activity in Asia that led to the founding of the churches at Laodicea, Colossae, Hierapolis and elsewhere (Col. 4:13) and perhaps also at Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Sardis and elsewhere (Rev. 2—3).” If this is the case, then this strengthens the view that a circular letter would be sent here first.

24 Talbert, Ephesians and Colossians, 34.
would make sense if Ephesians was circular. If this were true, then the case could be made that Paul, through his letter, was trying to unify the churches in Asia around the narrative of God’s victory in Christ and of the significant role of the universal church in God’s purposes for cosmic unification. Based on these presuppositions, I will now commence defending my thesis through a word study on κλήσις in the ancient world and an exegetical and theological analysis of the divine embodiment theme in Ephesians.

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25 This being said, I believe that I can still speak of the “Ephesians” as the letter’s recipients and utilize historical background from Ephesus because it was the capitol city of the province and was a religious center and had strategic influence over all Asia Minor. As Clinton E. Arnold [Powers of Darkness: Principalities and Powers in Paul’s Letters (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 150] states, “The basic issues were the same throughout these western Asian churches.”
Chapter 1

The Usage of Καλέω and Κλῆσις in Greco-Roman, Jewish, and NT Literature

The Greek noun κλῆσις, is generally translated as “calling,” and is derived from the verb, καλέω, “to call.” The validity of this study on “calling” hinges upon an “embodiment” interpretation of the word κλῆσις. In this chapter, then, I will provide a detailed word study of κλῆσις, in its Greco-Roman, Jewish, and New Testament contexts to show how this is the case. Because of the noun’s intimate connection with καλέω, it will be necessary to include the verb in the study as well.

Greco-Roman Literature

In classical Greek, the verb καλέω had two primary meanings. First, it could mean to issue a request or command for someone to be present at a house, feast, etc. (e.g. Homer, Iliad 10.195; Odyssey 10.231). Second, it could mean to bestow a name on someone or something or to address someone by name (e.g. Homer, Iliad 5.306). The term also developed two secondary meanings. First it could be used in the specific judicial meaning of calling someone before a court of law (e.g. Demosthenes, de Falsa Legatione 212). Second, it could mean to appeal to someone or to invoke the gods (e.g. Demosthenes, de Corona 141).

In its Greek context, neither καλέω nor κλῆσις were regularly used to speak of a divine calling. The main reason for this, per L. Coenen, is that Greek society did not recognize the biblical concept of work as a calling or vocation. Instead, he claims that, in place of κλῆσις, “an

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individual’s activity in the working society was called *ergon* (=work), *ponos* (=burden), *epangelia*, assent (=promise), *pragma*, deed (=work), *techne*, art, *schesis*, situation, condition, or *taxis*, order.”27 Thus, during this time, the idea that one was called to perform a specific task remained only in the consciousness of priests, “and to some extent to those who devoted themselves to intellectual and administrative tasks.”28 One exception to this, and I think pertinent to this study, is the Stoic view of calling exemplified by Epictetus. In his treatise, the Stoic rebukes those who complain about their situation because they are disgracing the “calling [κλῆσις] with which [God] called [καλέω]” them (*Dissertations* 1.29.49). The calling here seems to refer to, as Coenen states it, the impersonal “demand made on him [the Stoic] by a critical position to maintain the truth and power of his principles.”29 Here, I think we have a close connection to Ephesians 4:1, in which the grammar is similar with that of this text. The Stoic views himself as having been called to the specific tasks of maintaining both the truth and his principles. The church, as I am arguing, has also been called to the specific task of divine embodiment. Paul was familiar with Stoic beliefs, as evidenced by his discourse with them on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16ff.), and it is possible that this idea was in the background of his mind in Ephesians 4:1. The Stoic belief was not the norm in Greek literature, however, so to acquire the necessary linguistic background for this study’s thesis, we must turn to Judaism.

**Jewish Literature**

Within Second Temple Judaism, usages of καλέω and κλῆσις are scarce outside of the LXX. In fact, according to Moises Silva, only the Qumran community seemed to have a special


29 Coenen, “Call,” 271.
sense of call, which they related to their election by God as a called-out community (e.g. CD 4.4; 1QM 2.7; 1QSa 2.11–13). The only time the call of God is mentioned in their literature is in 1QM 14.5, in which God calls a sword of judgment on the nations. Therefore, to get an adequate sense of the Jewish concept of κλήσις, we must look to the LXX. According to K. L. Schmidt, κλήσις, in the LXX, never refers to the idea of calling; instead, it is almost always referring to an “invitation.” The reason for this, he submits, is because “the LXX as a translation is influenced by the Hebrew, which has fewer verbal nouns than verbs.” This means that when looking at the LXX, one must look at the statements concerning καλέω, instead of κλήσις, to get an idea of the Jewish conception of calling.

Καλέω is used 480 times in the LXX and is the standard rendering of the Hebrew verb, קָרָא, “to call, call out, or recite.” According to Takamitsu Muraoka, the verb can carry the following ten different meanings in the LXX. First, it can mean to give a name to someone or something, often with God as the one who is the one naming (e.g. Gen. 1:10; c.f. Jdt. 18:12; Sir. 36:17). Second, it can be used to refer to somebody as something (e.g. Hos. 1:10b; c.f. Isa. 56:7; 1 Macc. 2:3). Third, it can mean to address someone as something, such as a mother or father (e.g. Isa. 8:4; c.f. Exod. 33:19; Jdt. 21:13). Fourth, it can refer to a public proclamation of something, such as a feast day (e.g. Exod. 12:16). Fifth, it can mean to invite someone as a guest

30 Ibid., 604
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Silva, “καλέω,” 602.; L. Copes, “קָרָא,” Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament 2:2063. It is used mainly in Genesis (84 times) as a “Semitic idiom for giving a name to a person or place” and in Isaiah (59 times).
36 See also Josephus, Antiquities 1.34.
This is also the most common use of the noun κλῆσις (e.g. Jdt. 12:10; 3 Macc. 5:14). Sixth, it be used to proclaim a public event (e.g. Isa. 22:12; c.f. Jer. 41:8). Seventh, it can mean an invocation of the divine name (e.g. Deut. 32:3). Eighth, it can mean to call something or somebody after somebody, to attach his/her name to it, indicating ownership (e.g. 2 Kgs. 12:28; c.f. Isa. 4:1). Ninth, it can mean to call out somebody’s name so to identify with him or her (e.g. Isa. 45:4).

Finally, the meaning onto which I would like to draw attention is the tenth meaning, in which the verb means to call upon somebody or something to perform a certain task. For example, in Exodus 2:7, Moses’ sister asks Pharaoh’s daughter, “shall I go and call [καλέσω] a nurse for you from among the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?” Another example is Balak’s address to Balaam in Numbers 24:10, “I called [κέκληκά] you so that you would curse my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times.” In both of these cases, a person’s being called is related to their role in a larger purpose. For the Hebrew nurse (Moses’ mother), she was to nurse the child in order to play a necessary role in his development. In the case of Balaam, he was to curse Israel so as to participate in king Balak’s military triumph (c.f. 4 Macc. 11:20; 2 Esd. 4:18). I think that it is in this lexical meaning that there is support for my thesis. If my interpretation of calling in Ephesians is correct, then the church has been called to perform a specific task in God’s cosmic plan. That task is divine embodiment.

\[^{37}\text{In a legal sense, it can also carry the idea of summoning an opponent before a court of law (Josephus, Antiquities 14.169)}\]
The New Testament

According to J. Eckert, the verb καλέω appears in almost every book of the NT. It appears the most in Pauline and so-called “deutero-Pauline” literature, that is, about 30 times. Outside of Paul, it appears the most in Luke-Acts (24 times) and in Matthew (17 times), with substantially fewer occurrences in Mark and the Johannine Literature. Hebrews and the Petrine epistles use the verb fairly often but it is less frequent in Jude and Revelation. Unlike the verb, κλήσις is only used in the Pauline epistles (9 times) and, to a much lesser extent, in Hebrews and 2 Peter (1 time each). I will now focus in on some of the meanings derived from these usages. First, I will describe, briefly, its meanings in the Gospels and Acts. Second, more extensively, I will explain the meanings located in the Pauline letters themselves.

Κλήσις in the Gospels and Acts

There are multiple uses of the verb in the Gospels and Acts. First, καλέω can mean to give a name or nickname (e.g. Matt. 1:21; John 1:42; Acts 1:19), which is in line with the standard usage in both Greek and Jewish literature. According to M. Silva, this usage is of particular importance in Luke 1:32, 35, where Jesus is called the “Son of the Most-High.”

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38 J. Eckert, “καλέω,” *The Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 2:240. The reasons for the decline of occurrences in Mark and in John, per Schmidt [“καλέω,” 487] are: (i) because there are fewer sayings of Jesus in Mark than the other gospels; and (ii) because John has his own distinctive vocabulary compared with the Synoptic Gospels.


40 The reason why I have limited the non-Pauline literature studied in this section to the gospels and Acts is because the uses of the verb and noun in the Catholic Epistles and Revelation are not particularly helpful to our study because they use many of the same meanings Paul does in his letters. I will, however, give a brief overview here: 1 Peter speaks of believers being called to certain privileges and blessings (2:9; 3:9), or hardships (2:20ff). In 2 Peter 1:3, believers are said to have been called to God’s glory and excellence, but they are also told to “make sure” their calling (κλήσις) and election through holy practice. In Hebrews, believers are said to share in a heavenly call (κλήσις), which, per Eckert [“καλέω,” 243], is probably referring to the call that leads to heaven. Finally, Revelation speaks of those called, or invited, to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9).
Consequently, his followers will be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9) and children of God (1 John 3:1). The new name is here clearly an expression for the new existence granted by an act of God.\textsuperscript{41} Second, it can mean to invite someone to an event.\textsuperscript{42} This is primarily found in the parables of the great banquet (Luke 14:16–25) and of the marriage feast (Matt. 22:2–10; Mark 2:15; John 2:2; c.f. Rev. 19:9). In a more authoritative sense, it can mean to use one’s authority to have a person or group appear (Matt. 25:14; Luke 19:13; Acts 4:18).\textsuperscript{43} Third, and most pertinent to this study, the verb is used when Jesus calls his disciples (Mark 1:16–20; Matt 4:18–22). Regarding this use, Eckert claims, “Jesus is proclaimed as the one who calls disciples from their previous ties into discipleship and participation in the proclamation of the kingdom of God through the sovereign power of his divine word.”\textsuperscript{44} This seems to support my thesis that calling can refer to a specific role that people play. In the Gospels, the disciples are tasked with proclaiming the kingdom of God. Likewise, in Ephesians, the church is tasked with embodying God in the present world.

\textbf{Κλησις in Pauline Literature}

Paul uses καλέω almost always with the sense of divine calling.\textsuperscript{45} Overwhelmingly, he uses the verb to describe the act by which God draws, those whom he has already chosen and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{41} Silva, “καλέω,” 605.
  \item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Eckert, “καλέω,” 242. Emphasis added. The verb only occurs in Mark’s version, but the idea can be inferred into the Matthew passage as well.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Coenen [“καλέω,” 275], claims that there are 3 exceptions to this. First, in 1 Cor. 5:9, the passive is used to refer to an expression of the character and existence of Paul, who claims that he is “unfit to be called an apostle.” Second, in 1 Cor. 10:27, the verb is used in the sense of “to invite.” Third, Paul uses the verb when quoting from the LXX in Romans 9:7 (Gen 21:12), 9:25 (Hos. 2:23), and 9:26 (Hos. 1:10), in which all use the verb in the sense of naming Israel as the people of God.
\end{itemize}
appointed, “out of bondage of this world so that he may justify them and bring them into his service.” The clearest example of this use is Romans 8:29–30, “For those whom he foreknew, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he would be the first-born among many brothers; and whom he predestined, these he also called [ἐκάλεσεν]; and those whom he called, he justified, and those whom he justified, he also glorified” (emphasis added). The calling in this passage happens to those whom God has already foreknown and predestined, presumably for justification and glorification, and refers to “God’s effectual summoning into relationship with Him” (c.f. 1 Thess. 2:12). For Paul, the only way for persons to receive justification and future glorification is to enter relationship with God. This cannot happen on their own initiative; however, it can only happen if God initiates relationship through his call, which puts them into a position to respond (c.f. Rom. 4:17).

Paul makes it clear that this salvific call is initiated by God’s grace, actualized by Christ (2 Tim. 1:9; c.f. Gal 1:6), and is mediated by the message of the gospel, which is proclaimed by God’s people, “For this purpose he also called [ἐκάλεσεν] you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14) On top of salvation, God’s call results in the benefits of the placing of believers into his kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12), and drawing them into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor. 1:9) and the fellowship of peace, which is the body of Christ, the Church (Col. 3:15). On this note, κλῆσις, being a “technical Pauline term,” almost always refers to a call to experience salvation or the benefits thereof. For example, the prize of

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46 Silva, “καλέω,” 606. I believe that this explains why so many commentators on Ephesians automatically assume that this is the type of “calling” Paul is referring to in Ephesians 4:1.


48 Silva [“καλέω,” 606] notes here that “while God’s call is addressed to the individual, it never concerns each person alone”; it is intimately connected with defining the people of God.
the “upward call” (ἀνω κλήσεως) is resurrection (Phil. 3:14). Also, in 1 Corinthians 1:26–31, Paul tells the Corinthians to “consider” the odd nature of their “calling” (κλησιν). He explains that few of them were wise, strong, or noble when God called them in Christ to “righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” which is exactly the opposite of the basis on which the world chooses people, but God has done this for his glory.

Even though it only appears once in Paul’s letters, the use of καλέω that I would like to discuss in detail appears in Paul’s description of his call to apostleship in Galatians 1:15–16 (c.f. the similar use of the adjective in the same word group, κλητός, in Rom. 1:1 and 1 Cor. 1:1 where Paul claims that he has been “called to be an apostle.”). In these verses, Paul states, “But when God, the one who had set me apart from my mother’s womb, and who called (καλέσας) me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me, so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult with flesh and blood” (emphasis added). Colin Kruse argues that this text reveals six important aspects of Paul’s apostolic calling:

1. He had been chosen by God for this task even before he was born.
2. His own realization of this calling came to him by a revelation from God at the time determined by God himself.
3. It had nothing to do with anything deserving on Paul’s part; it came through God’s grace.
4. It involved a revelation by God of his son Jesus Christ to Paul so that he might preach Christ to others.
5. The preaching ministry to which he was called had a specific scope: to the Gentiles.
6. It came directly from God, without any human mediation.50

49 Schmidt, “καλέω,” 492. The only exceptions to this are 1 Corinthians 7:20, in which κλῆσις refers to the position or condition that one holds [Danker et al. BDAG, 549] and, as I will argue, Ephesians 1:18 and 4:4.

50 Colin G. Kruse, “Call, Calling,” in The Dictionary of Paul and His letters (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 85. Richard N. Longenecker [Galatians (Word Biblical Commentary 41; Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 31] makes the point that the phrase, “set me apart from my mother’s womb” (1:15), is an expression rooted in the call narratives of the OT prophets (c.f. Jer. 1:5) and the Servant of YHWH in Isaiah (c.f. 49:1–6). This means that Paul viewed his apostleship along the lines of the OT prophetic tradition. Also on this point c.f. Eckert, “καλέω,” 242.
Thus, according to this passage, God’s call to Paul was not only a call to bring Paul to faith and salvation, but also a call to his role within the purposes of God: he was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

This is exactly the meaning that Paul is trying to provide the church with in Ephesians 4:1 and is grounded in the surrounding literary context. In Ephesians 3:1–13, Paul begins by saying that he is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” (3:1). Next, Paul explains the reason for his imprisonment: his fulfillment of his apostolic duties. He describes his apostleship as the “administration of the grace of God,” that was given to him for the Gentiles (3:2). According to Timothy Gombis, these verses show Paul’s belief that God’s granting him this commission and imprisonment are of “immense cosmic significance” as they are all a component in the “unfolding gospel story of God’s triumph in Christ, and God’s resurrection power is operative in a situation that looks initially like God’s power is absent.”

Paul is literally “embodying God’s victory” in his apostleship, even while in prison. Thus, in 4:1 he is encouraging them to imitate him as he walks out his calling as an apostle. Just as Paul’s obedient life of weakness as an apostle brings glory to God, so too, the church is to be obedient to her calling as the embodiment of God’s presence and glory in the world. This is the calling of which they are to walk worthy.

Conclusion

I have shown that my interpretation of κλησις in Ephesians 4:1 is lexically possible in all its contextual spheres. In Greco-Roman literature, the Stoic believed that he must walk worthy of

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51 Gombis, Drama, 114.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 138.
the calling that God placed on his life to uphold the truth and maintain his principles. In Jewish literature, the LXX uses the word group in the stories of Moses’ sister and Balaam, to call someone hither so that they might play a role in a larger plan. In the Gospels, Jesus, after calling his disciples to a new existence, called them to participate in his proclamation of the kingdom of God. And finally, Paul viewed his calling to be an apostle as a key role in God’s redemptive plan. In the same way, in Ephesians, the Church, the community of new creation, is called to the task of divine embodiment that will carry God’s presence and display his glory to all powers and all peoples. With these lexical findings, in chapter 2, the study will move into the exegesis of Ephesians itself to see if my interpretation of “calling” in 4:1 flows naturally out of the theological narrative Paul tells in chapters 1—3 and best explains the moral imperatives in 4—6.
Chapter 2
The Church Called to Divine Embodiment in Ephesians 1—3

The goal of this chapter is to provide an exegesis of Ephesians 1—3 with special attention given to the ways in which Paul describes the church. I hope to show that each chapter climaxes with describing the calling of the church as embodying God and thus giving a reason for interpreting “calling” in 4:1 in this way. Once this has been done, I will end the chapter with a discussion of how divine embodiment is consistent with Paul’s thought in his other letters.

Paul’s Flow of Thought in Ephesians 1—3

The exegesis will follow the following structure of Ephesians 1—3:

1. The epistolary greeting (1:1–2)
2. A berakah that praises God for what he has done for the church in Christ (1:3–14)
3. Paul’s first intercessory prayer: the church as the body of Christ (1:15–23)
4. A double-narrative about God’s defeat over the evil powers: believers one body in Christ (2:1–22)
5. Paul’s description of the apostolic mystery and ministry (3:1–13)
6. Paul’s second intercessory prayer: the church as the fullness of God (3:14–21)

The Greeting (1:1–2)

Paul opens his letter by introducing himself as an ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ (“an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God”; 1:1a). The genitive Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ functions as a subjective genitive and refers to his being sent by Christ.54 This claim is strengthened by διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, by which Paul is referring to the conviction that his commission and gospel are not the product of human ingenuity. Instead, he claims that his apostolic calling originates directly from the will of God himself (c.f. Gal. 1:12, 15–17). Next, he

addresses the recipients as τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς ὁσίων καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“the saints, even the faithful in Christ Jesus”; 1:1b). By describing his readers as τοῖς ἁγίοις, members of God’s chosen holy people, and πιστοῖς, faithful, he is already encouraging them to think of their identity and role as a part of the new creation of God.

I submit that even this brief description of the recipients in the greeting supports my thesis. According to Romans 5, Paul viewed the church as a new creation called into being by God himself through the work of Christ as the last Adam (5:1–21; c.f. Rom. 4:17). In this new creation, God has taken those who were condemned sinners (5:18–19a), given them new life in Christ, and has made them a righteous community created in the image of Christ (5:19b–20; c.f. Col. 3:10). Then in Romans 6:4, Paul stated that believers had been united with Christ in his death and resurrection so that they would not live like sinners anymore but, instead, “walk” (περιπατέω) in “newness of life” (καινότητι ζωῆς). My point is that, for Paul, being a new creation entails living a new life by nature. This is the same message as in Ephesians 1:1. The Ephesians are “saints,” members of God’s new humanity, created after the image of Christ, and are, therefore, characterized by lives of faithfulness. Just as Christ was faithful to God, so too the Ephesians are faithful to Christ. This is divine embodiment in a nutshell; the community is giving physical representation to Christ’s faithfulness on earth. In the rest of the chapter, Paul will expand what it means to be part of God’s new creation.

55 Muddimann [Ephesians, 60-61], claims that καὶ is not always a conjunctive “and” in the Greek. It can also be emphatic or epexegetic and can be translated as “also” or “even.” C.f. Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 282.

56 Paul ends his greeting with a blessing, χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”; 1:2) which, according to Talbert [Ephesians and Colossians, 35], is a slight variation of the occasional use of “mercy and peace” in Jewish greetings (e.g. 2 Bar. 78:2). Schnackenberg [Ephesians, 43] notes that θεοῦ is the object of the preposition ἀπό, which indicates that God is the origin of the grace and peace in the Christian life. C.f. Merkle, Ephesians, 13. Of course, this verse indicates that there is a dual source of this grace and peace, κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.
The Berakah (1:3–14)

In verses 3–14, Paul utilizes a Jewish blessing formula, a berakah (set off by εὐλογητός), to praise God for the things with which he has blessed the community in Christ.57 He claims that God has blessed believing Jews ἐν πάσῃ εὐλογίᾳ πνευματικῇ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις ἐν Χριστῷ (“with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus”; 1:3).58 The phrase, ἐν Χριστῷ, makes it clear that the community’s union with Christ is the basis of the blessings they receive.59 According to Gombis, the “in Christ” language in this passage indicates the reality of the incorporation of believers into Christ. Concerning this incorporation, he states, “The people of God are not merely loved by God or saved by God; we are brought into God.”60 This means that, not only has God transferred them out of the realm controlled by the evil powers and into the new realm of Christ by the Spirit, but Ephesians 1:6 portrays the church being “caught up into the love relationship that God shares between God the Father and Jesus Christ, his Son.”61 Because the church has been united with the Son, the church receives the same love and good

57 According to Best [Ephesians, 105], berakoth were regularly used in Jewish worship, especially at meals. He claims that Jesus would have used one at the Last Supper (Mark. 14:22; Matt. 26:26). In this way, it passed into Christian worship including that of the eucharist. Curt Niccum [“Heaven Can’t Wait: The Church in Ephesians and Colossians.” in The New Testament Church: The Challenge of Developing Ecclesiology (John Harrison and James D. Dvorak eds.; McMaster Biblical Studies Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 140] states that this practice points to the “repertoire of prayer” in these communities.

58 Gary Edward Weedman [“Reading Ephesians from the New Perspective on Paul” Leaven 14.2 (2006): 82] does an excellent job of discussing the “we/you language” in 1:3–14. He argues that most of the time Paul utilizes “us” or “we” he is referring to Jewish Christians and most of the time Paul uses “you” he is referring to Gentile believers. I agree with this distinction because I believe that Paul makes it clear in 1:13 when he states, ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ, “in him you also.” Here, Paul is stating that the Gentile readers have been included, along with the Jews, in God’s blessings in Christ. C.f. McRay, Paul, 340-46; Jack Haberer, “Ephesians 1:15–23” Interpretation 62.3 (July 2008): 312.

59 Constantine Campbell [Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 84], notes that a straightforward rendering of ἐν Χριστῷ in 1:3 is “instrumental.” God has blessed us through Christ with every spiritual blessing.

60 Gombis, Drama, 68-69.

61 Ibid. This is why Paul says that God has freely bestowed his grace on us ἐν τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ (“in the beloved”; 1:6). He is stressing the loving relationship between the Father and the Son.
gifts that God the Father gives to the Son (c.f. James 1:17). Regarding my thesis, this union with Christ speaks directly to the role of the church in the world. If it is true that the church receives the same gifts from the Father that he gives to the Son, then the church, in its very existence, embodies the generosity of God. When people see the church, and all that God has given her, they are compelled to think that God must be a loving Father who gives good gifts to his children (Matt. 7:11).

In verses 4–14, Paul begins to list what some of these gifts that God has given to the church are. He claims that these believers: (i) were “chosen” (ἐκλέγομαι) in Christ before the foundation of the world to be blameless before him; (ii) were “predestined” (προοριζομαι) for adoption as sons; (iii) are recipients of “redemption” (ἀπολύτρωσις), which is the forgiveness of sins, through Christ’s blood; (iv) have been made aware of God’s “mystery” (μυστήριον); (v)

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62 William A. Simmons [Peoples of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2008), 288-89] states that the early church was birthed within the context of patron-client relationships, in which wealthy patrons would bestow benefices (gifts) onto their clients in order to build up a base group loyal to him/her. In response to this, the social expectation was for the client to repay the debt out of gratitude (Seneca, Epistles 81.12). This could be relieved through cash installments, provide services, lend political support, include the patron in his or her will, or simply sing the praises of the patron at every opportunity. God is frequently pictured as the ultimate patron (Acts 14:7; 17:24–28) whose greatest gift to humanity is the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, in turn, becomes a broker, a mediator, between God and humanity. He mediates the gift of the Spirit and all of the charismatic gifts that empower the church. Here, in 1:4–14, God is functioning as a patron who is showering blessings on his clients.

63 According to Arnold [Ephesians, 9], people living in Ephesus and all of Asia Minor would have lived in constant dread of astral powers that controlled their fate (c.f. Manilius, Astronomica, 1.25-112). So, to them, the fact that God chose them before he created would have comforted them. YHWH, not the evil powers, was in control of their lives.

64 Many Christians, especially those in the reformed camp, because of the language of this blessing, tend to hear Paul commenting on the “who’s in, who’s out” game. The language of “predestination” automatically causes many to think about what they have learned from systematic theology about God’s decree to choose some in humanity for eternal salvation and some for eternal damnation. I agree with Gombis [Drama, 77], when he states that this reading of “predestination” in 1:5 is “not a proper understanding of the character of [Paul’s view] of election.” For Paul, election language has to do with defining the identity and character of the people of God, “it does not have to do with parsing out the order of God’s decrees in eternity past. Paul is meaning to affirm that those who are called to participate in and perform the gospel of Jesus Christ are those who have their origin in God’s heart and mind from all eternity.” On adoption language, Gary Gromacki [“The Plan and Power of God the Father in Ephesians,” Journal of Ministry and Theology 19.2 (Fall 2015): 25-26] notes that adoption in Roman context referred to the legal establishment of a kinship relationship between two people that was recognized as being equivalent to physical descent.
have obtained an “inheritance” (κληρονομία); and (vi) have been “sealed” (σφραγίζω) with the promised Holy Spirit, who guarantees their inheritance. Throughout the passage, Paul makes it clear that each of these blessings were done according to God’s eternal plan, which culminates in the ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ (“the gathering together of all things in Christ”; 1:5, 9, 10–11). The infinitive ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι refers to the action of “bringing together distinguishable elements under the rubric of a single entity” and, here, refers to the restoration of the original unity of creation in Christ. This is done so that the τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ (“the first to hope in Christ”) would be εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (“to the praise of his glory”; 1:12), which continues the God-centered focus of this passage.

What would have been noticed by Paul’s readers as incredible about verse 12, however, is that the believing community has a part to play in God’s eternal purpose of new creation in Christ. As the community is redeemed, God receives more and more glory and his plan is

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65 Arnold, Ephesians, 10. Arnold claims that seals were widely used in the ancient world to declare possession. All of a person’s valuable possessions, including slaves, were marked with the impression of the seal (normally made of engraved hard stones or precious metals). Concerning this passage, he states, “The one true God has also marked his possessions by means of a seal, yet his seal does not leave a physical impression. He has given his people the gift of the Holy Spirit as a sign of their belonging to him.”


68 According to Richard Roitto [Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behavior Norms in Ephesians. Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 46. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 173], “the Christ-event needs to be complemented with the ekklesia…the ingroup is not an end in its own right in God’s grand plan, but an instrument to manifest his wisdom.”
further accomplished. For Paul, the church is the first fulfillment of the “gathering together of all things” under Christ. He indicates this in verse 13 when he says, ἐν ὧ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἁληθείας τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν ἐν ὧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες ἐσφραγίσθητε τῷ πνεύματι τῆς ἐπιγέλης τῷ ἁγίῳ (“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”). Up until this point, Paul has been describing the blessings that have been given the Jewish believers, however, through the use of καὶ ὑμεῖς in verse 13, Paul includes his Gentile readers in the blessed community. Before Christ, as Paul will go into detail about in 2:11–22, the Gentiles were separated from the Jews, the covenant people of God. But now, in Christ, both Jew and Gentile are gathered together into God’s new humanity by the Spirit. The church’s role, then, is to embody, in the present, the future culmination of God’s eternal plan to redeem all of creation in Christ (c.f. Rom. 8:18–25). After stating this, Paul becomes so impassioned for his readers to comprehend this role in all its glory that he stops his berakah and begins to pray for them.

Paul’s First Intercession: The Church as Christ’s Body (1:15–23)

In 1:15–23, Paul intercedes for the readers concerning their comprehension of God’s power towards them and their role in his plan. Before exegeting the prayer itself, the question must be asked why Paul recorded this prayer in the first place. He could have stopped writing, prayed passionately for the Spirit to illumine his readers’ hearts to understand what he had just written, and then continued writing. But he did not do this. In fact, there are two recorded prayers in Ephesians (1:15–23; 3:14–21). Why? I believe that he did it for emphasis sake. A person’s greatest desire for another person can be seen most clearly in what she prays for on their behalf. In essence, I believe Paul is saying, “Pay attention, after all of what I have been saying, this is
what I want you to get! This is what I am constantly asking God for, because this is your greatest need.” If this is the case, then it would greatly strengthen my thesis if divine embodiment imagery were found in Paul’s prayers. I intend to show that Paul’s prayer in 1:15–23 climaxes with such imagery.

First, Paul offers the basis of his intercession claiming that he has heard of the readers’ πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ (“faith in the Lord Jesus”) and τὴν ἁγάπην τὴν εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους (“love for all the saints” 1:15). It seems that, during his imprisonment, Paul has received reports, concerning the churches in Asia minor, that they have been living faithfully as members of new creation and it is on this basis that he “thanks” (εὐχαριστέω) God for them (1:16a) and begins to intercede for them (1:16b).69 He asks God to grant them two things: (i) πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ (“the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him [God]”); and (ii) an enlightening (φωτίζω) of their hearts (1:17–18a). Concerning the πνεῦμα in 1:17, I submit that it refers to the Holy Spirit. For humanity to begin to comprehend the truths of the gospel, they must have received the Holy Spirit, who communicates the mind of Christ to them (c.f. 1 Cor. 2:6–16).70 D. A. Carson notes that the knowledge Paul is talking about is not a corpus of truth to be picked up from a systematic theology textbook. Instead, it probably refers to

69 Gordon Wiles [Paul’s Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of the Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St Paul (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 22-29], identifies this prayer and the prayer in chapter 3 as “wish prayers.” He states that the general character of wish-prayers is “the expression of a desire that God take action regarding the person(s) mentioned in the wish. He also gives the basic structure of a wish-prayer: “(1) The prayer begins with the subject God, (2) continues with a predicate having one or more verbs usually in the optative, (3) together with a noun or pronoun for the one to be benefited. (4) An additional benefit is then expressed either by a purpose clause, or by an additional clause, or an adjectival or prepositional phrase.” This is consistent with what we have in Ephesians 1:15–23.

70 As John Chrysostom states, “there is need of spiritual ‘wisdom,’ that we may perceive things spiritual, that we may see things hidden. That Spirit ‘reveals’ all things. He is going to set forth the mysteries of God. Now the knowledge of the mysteries of God, the Spirit alone comprehends, who also searches the deep things of Him…If we learn God, from Him from whom we ought to learn Him, that is from the Spirit Himself; then shall we no longer dispute concerning anything” (Homilies on Ephesians 3.60). C.f. D. A. Carson, Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 151.
wisdom that shows us “how to live in God’s universe so as to please him.” Paul hopes that through the power of the Spirit, the readers’ hearts may be enlightened to know three things: (i) ἡ ελπίς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ (“the hope of their calling”; 1:18a); (ii) ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις (“the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints”; 1:18b); and (iii) τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας (“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”; 1:19a).

The “hope” (ἐλπίς) to which Paul is referring is the glorious end to which God has destined believers and to which the fulfillment of their calling leads. It is another facet of the “gathering together of all things in Christ” mentioned in 1:10 and is further expounded in 4:13–15, in which the telos of the church is described as coming to the ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ νόον τοῦ θεοῦ (“the unity of faith and knowledge of the son of God”) and to maturity, μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”). The hope is that the Christian community will become like Christ (c.f. Rom. 8:29). Paul is adamant that his readers realize this! Because the church is the end-time community of new creation that has been called into being by God in the present, she must constantly work, by the power of the Spirit, toward this eschatological goal of maturity in Christ. As the church works in the world with this hope in sight, she embodies the same attitude of Jesus, its savior, who “for the joy set before him, endured the cross” (Heb. 12:2).

71 Carson, Praying, 152.

72 According to Best [Ephesians, 166], ἐλπίς, here, does not refer to the subjective feeling of expectant hoping. Instead, the emphasis lies on the content of what is hoped for. Along with Merkle [Ephesians, 43], I take κλήσεως here to be a “genitive of source” indicating that the readers’ hope has its origin in their calling. When God calls the church into being and to the vocation of embodying him on earth, a hope for the church is born: that the church would become the full stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13). As Thielman, [Ephesians, 98-99] states, “In 1:18 and 4:4 ‘calling’ is connected with hope, emphasizing its future fulfillment.”
The “inheritance” (κληρονομίας) spoken of in 1:18 is God’s, in contrast to the believers’ inheritance in 1:14, and refers to the believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who comprise his holy people, his prized possession. The “power” (δύναμις) in 1:19 refers to the immeasurable, miraculous might of God that surpasses any other power. Paul’s point is that the community should know that this power it is at work on behalf of the church. In verses 20–21, Paul takes some time to describe this power in detail. It is the same power that he used (ἐνεργέω) to raise Christ from the dead and seat him at his right hand (1:20), ὑπέράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος καὶ παντός ὀνόματος ὅνομαζόμενον so μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι. (“far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”; 1:21) What Paul is saying is that God has achieved victory over the evil cosmic powers through the resurrection of Christ. At this point, Paul cannot help but to continue describing the exalted state of Christ, which he does in 1:22–23.

Paul goes on to say that God πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοῦ πόδας αὐτοῦ (“subjected all things under his feet”; 1:22a). Christ has been placed over all the powers that held evil sway in the

73 Lincoln, Ephesians, 59-60.

74 Arnold, Ephesians, 13, The Ephesians were converted out of the use of magical practices (Acts 19). Discerning and using the names of spirit powers was central to the use of magic. There is a tradition of six magical names associated with Ephesus itself. They were the names of powerful spirit beings who could be called upon for assistance and protections. Paul wants his readers to know that none of these spirits, no matter how powerful, rivals Christ’s power and authority.

75 Dan Lioy, “Paul’s Apocalyptic Interpretation of Reality: A Case Study Analysis of Ephesians 1:15–23,” Conspectus 19 (2015): 50, argues that the verb ἐνεργέω, used in 1:20 conceptually lings to the use of the lexically related noun ἐνέργεια in verse 19. “When the Son died on the cross, his enemies thought they had ended his existence; yet the bonds of death were broken as a result of the Father raising the Son immortal from the grave.”

76 This incredible thought would have encouraged believers in Asia Minor, which, according to Udo Schnelle [Theology of the New Testament (M. Eugene Boring trans.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 560], “was shaped by local cults, mystery religious, and the powerful and all-pervasive Artemis cult, with its many diverse practices.” He states further, that many new members of the church probably experienced a religious insecurity, not sure how they should live in response to these attractive alternatives. What Paul is saying is that Christ stands over all of these things.
world and they are subject to him. According to Clinton Arnold, Paul viewed this as a messianic fulfillment of Psalm 8:6, “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (ESV) and Psalm 110:1, “The LORD says to my Lord: ‘sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”’ Arnold comments on this fulfillment thusly:

Just as humanity was given dominion over the physical creation to rule over it (Psa. 8:6), Christ has now been given mastery over the entire realm of spirits and angels by virtue of his resurrection and exaltation. Chris’s dominion, however, will extend far beyond the spirit realm to include all of creation. Psalm 110:1 was the most frequently cited Old Testament passage by early Christian writers. It was commonly used to interpret God’s enthronement of Christ. The ‘enemies’ of this psalm were always identified with the invisible powers whom Christ defeated and subjugated. In his interpretation of the psalm, Paul gave a representative list of the powers Christ has conquered. His subjugation of the powers of evil thus fulfills Old Testament expectation.

After stating the awesomeness of Christ’s power in 1:20–22a, Paul re-emphasizes that this power is to be used on behalf of the church. He states that God has given Christ as κεφαλὴ ὑπὲρ πάντα τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ (“head over all things for the church”; 1:22b). Concerning this, Andrew Lincoln argues, “Thus, God has given Christ a position of cosmic rulership and has, in turn, given him to the Church.” The term, ἐκκλησία, here refers, not to any specific local

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77 According to C. L. Brinks [‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians’: Acts 19:23–41 in Light of Goddess Worship in Ephesus,” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 71 (2009): 783-84], for believers in Ephesus, the picture of Christ ruling over the powers would have been comforting in their incredibly hostile environment. Ephesus was the center of the fertility goddess Artemis. It contained her temple, one of the wonders of the ancient world, and her face and temple were even depicted on the coins that the Ephesian believers would have used daily in their business.

78 Arnold, Powers, 107-08. According to Gordon D. Fee [Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2007), 353], in Paul’s mind, Christ has been appointed to be the “Lord” of Psalm 110:1 and thus to have all authority in heaven and on earth both in the present age and in the age to come. Frank Thielman [“Ephesians,” in Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament (G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson eds.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 815], argues that the thought here is close to Daniel 7:13–14 in which the Son of Man is exalted to the presence of God and receives dominion over all the nations of the earth. Thorsten Moritz [A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians (Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 85. Leiden: Brill, 1996), 16 – 17], notes that Jesus brings both Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 together at his Jewish trial (Mark 14:62). This probably means that the Jewish interpreters of Jesus’ time had already brought the two texts together as messianic texts.
congregation, but to the universal church, composed of all believers. The idea of Christ as the κεφαλή, then is used here to denote that all of Christ’s power, supremacy, and authority that God has given to Christ has been given to be used on behalf of the church. Arnold notes that this indicates that the church has a special role in God’s purposes for the cosmos as the arena where God’s power is displayed. The climax of Paul’s prayer explicates this role further in 1:23, in which the church is described with two images. These images are important for my thesis so I will spend some time on them.

The first image that Paul uses to describe the church is as Christ’s σῶμα (“body” 1:23a). Many suggestions have been made as to how the idea of σῶμα originated in Paul’s thought. First, the imagery of σῶμα was used extensively in Greco-Roman literature as a metaphor for the political community (e.g. Livy, History of Rome 2.32; Seneca, Epistulae Morales 95.52). Second, the actual experience of community and common participation in the Eucharist, in which Christ’s body and blood are consumed, and the Spirit could have been the ground for his “one body” language. Third, the OT idea of corporate personality, which Peter O’Brien describes as, “the movement between the one and the many [that] can be expressed by the one term and yet have overtones of solidarity,” was used by Paul in view of Christ as the Last Adam and representative of the new humanity (Rom. 5:12–21). Fourth, the imagery may have come from Paul’s own encounter with the exalted Christ on the Damascus road in which Christ identified himself with his followers, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4; 22:7; 26:14). I think that the fourth option is the best explanation for the origin of the idea, however,

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79 Lincoln, Ephesians, 67.
80 Arnold, Powers, 70.
81 Dunn, Romans 1—8 (Word Biblical Commentary 38A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 723.
82 O’Brien, Ephesians, 148.
Paul was probably influenced by all four of these main options. As James Dunn puts it, “To search for a single origin for the body of Christ imagery is therefore probably too much of an oversimplification; several influences could be traced in it.”

Carol Stockhausen claims that the author of Ephesians (she does not believe in Pauline authorship) thought of the body in a very concrete way. She argues that the phrase, the body of Christ, does not simply metaphorically express the unity of Christ and believers; instead, the church as Christ’s body really exists in space and time, “from Christ, the head, in the highest heavens to all Christians here on earth. So, the physical world itself is transformed and included in a concrete ‘body’ which is Christ himself.” In contrast, I do not believe that Paul was thinking that the cosmos and Christ’s body were equivalent. This, instead, would seem to reflect the gnostic idea of the supreme god’s human figure making up the cosmos, which is something Paul would have combatted. Allow me to put forward a way Paul might have envisioned the church as body. If we take Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus as the main, though not only, influence to his concept of body, then I submit that Paul uses the term metaphorically, though not abstractly, to refer to the agency by which Christ accomplishes his work on earth. When Saul the Pharisee was persecuting the church, it could be said that he was persecuting Christ himself because the church, through the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ

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83 Dunn, Romans 1—8, 724.


85 C.f. Susan Liubinskas, “The Body of Christ in Mission: Paul’s Ecclesiology and the Role of the Church in Mission,” Missiology: An International Review 41.4 (2013): 404. She states that “metaphorical language, by virtue of the fact that it preserves the literal meaning of the symbol, while intending an analogical secondary meaning, is able to communicate profound truths about reality, mainly by creating an alternative, symbolic way of seeing and understanding the world. Accordingly, the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ describes a real, although not literal, relationship that exists between Christ and the Church…the church is the body of Christ in the sense that it is constituted by Christ and enlivened by his indwelling.”

86 Lincoln, Ephesians, 70.
(Rom. 8:9), is the physical presence of Christ, his rule, and will on earth.\(^87\) If this is what Paul means by σῶμα, then this fits perfectly with my thesis that, for Paul, the calling of the church is to embody God in the world. Christ not only utilizes his power on behalf of his church, he also utilizes it through his church.

The second image Paul uses to describe the church is as τὸ πλήρωμα τῶ τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρομένου (“the fullness of the one who is filled entirely”; 1:23b). The term πλήρωμα does not reflect its uses in Valentinian Gnosticism, which interpreted the word as the totality of the thirty beings emanating from God, called aeons.\(^88\) Rather, it probably originates from the OT’s conception of divine presence. The adjective “full” frequently appears in this sense: “The House of the Lord is full [πλήρης] of his glory” (Ezek. 44:4). There are many grammatical issues in this statement that must be addressed if we are to accurately interpret it. First, is the noun πλήρωμα to be understood actively or passively? There is an ancient tradition of the church that takes the phrase actively and interprets the church as, in some sense, completing Christ.\(^89\) But I do not think that this is what Paul meant. According to Frank Thielman, elsewhere in Ephesians where πλήρωμα and its verbal cognate πληρώω appear in connection with believers they are filled with God’s fullness (3:19) or with the Spirit (5:18), and by growing, they expand to the size of Christ’s fullness (4:13). He states, “In other words, believers play a passive or neutral

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\(^87\) According to E. Schweizer “σῶμα,” Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 7:1078, it is the ministry of the proclamation of the gospel that is the ministry to the world. I would argue that actions are important too.


role, whereas Christ plays an active role (c.f. 4:10). Here, then, Paul probably meant that the Church was “that which is full of” something or someone.”

Second, the participle πληρομένου could be taken as a middle or passive. If the middle tense is taken, then the church is filled by Christ “who fills everything for himself.” This does not make sense of the flow of the passage, however. Throughout 1:20–23, Paul has emphasized how God’s action through Christ benefits the church, not how Christ’s own action benefits himself. Therefore, I believe that the passive is the best tense to take. As Thielman puts it, “The church is that which is filled by the One who is himself filled, presumably Christ.” The text does not say who or what fills Christ, but in a similar passage in Colossians 1, Paul speaks of Christ as the one in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). So, it appears that it is God who fills Christ. If this is the case, then how are we to interpret the phrase, τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν? If we take πληρομένου as a passive, then it cannot take a direct object, so the phrase must modify the participle adverbially: “the one who is filled entirely” by God. What is meant by this? Obviously, God’s filling of Christ connects with Christ’s lordship because of God’s nature as creator over all things. God has filled Christ, who, in turn, fills the church with his power and authority and, therefore, enables the church to be victorious over all evil forces. The point of 1:22–23, and I believe of the entire prayer, then, is that the church is literally the physical presence of the exalted messianic king on earth. She has been filled with Christ who is himself, the fullness of God. In this way, the church is a kind of incarnation of Christ in the

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90 Thielman, Ephesians, 114. C.f. Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 81; Best, Ephesians, 188.

91 Thielman, Ephesians, 115; c.f. Best, Ephesians, 188; Hoehner, Ephesians, 298-99.

92 According to Kim Jung Hoon [The Church as the Body of Christ: Ecclesiology in Ephesians in the Light of Eph 1:22-23 (Durham theses, Durham University, 1993. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/5652/), 157], Christ’s lordship operates behind the scene, and is manifested in the church, resulting in the ultimate redemption of believers and in the complete unity of the cosmos.
Just as Jesus was the locus of the presence of God while on earth, now the church is the locus of this presence on earth because she has been filled with Christ. Thus, Paul ends his prayer, and chapter 1, with a statement about the incarnational nature of the church’s role.

After finishing his prayer, in 2:1–22, Paul presents his Gentile readers with two narratives that remind them, first, about the state of their lives before Christ and, second, the new state of their lives after God’s victory over the evil powers through Christ. In the first narrative, 2:1–10, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were dead in their sins (2:1), enslaved to the evil powers (2:2), and destined for the wrath of God (2:3). Even though they were in this position, God, because of his great mercy (2:4), made them alive with Christ, raised them up, and seated them with Christ in heaven (2:6). He did this by defeating the power of death through Christ’s cross and resurrection. Paul stresses that this salvation was not accomplished by their own doing, but by God’s grace alone (2:8–9). Finally, he states that the church, as a result of this salvation is God’s ποίημα κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς ὑπὸ προητοίμασεν ὁ θεὸς ἵνα ἐν αὐτοῖς περιπατήσωμεν ("workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"; 2:10). Here, God displays his grace by turning those who had been “sons of disobedience” into those who love to do good. As Joseph Holloway states, “The former walk was expressive of a bondage to the demonic. The present

walk is expressive of a new ownership."  

One cannot claim to have been saved by grace, if they are not walking in God’s good works. The word, ποίημα, was used in the LXX to speak of God’s act of creation (Psa. 91:4; 142:5). In relation to my thesis, here in 2:10, Paul uses the word to describe believers as God’s new creation, which, just as the first creation was supposed to radiate God’s glory via the imago dei, displays the image of God to the world through embodying the works of God in her life. 

In the second narrative, 2:11–22, Paul recounts another plight under which the Gentile readers were suffering before Christ: they were not members of God’s people. This narrative is full of embodiment language, so I will spend more time here. In verses 11–12, Paul describes the grim nature of the readers’ predicament. He begins by saying that they need to “remember” (μνημονεύω) their past situation.  

Often, Israel was told to set up “stones of remembrance” so that neither they, nor their children, would forget the mighty acts of God in their midst (c.f. Josh. 4:1–24). So too, the Gentile believers must neither forget the mighty acts of God in their midst nor about their situation before God began to act. 

Paul wants them to remember 5 different conditions concerning their former state. First, they were called “uncircumcision” (ἀκροβυστία) by those who were called “circumcision” (περιτομή; 2:11). By calling the Gentiles uncircumcised, the Jews were not simply making a comment about Gentile anatomy; rather, they were saying that they were outside of God’s covenant because they had not received the sign of the covenant, which was circumcision (Gen. 94)


Merkle, *Ephesians*, 67 notes that μνημονεύω is the only imperative in the first three chapters of Ephesians. The lack of imperatives in the first three chapters definitely gives credence to the division of the book into two halves.
17). This fact flows into the other 4 conditions described in verse 12. Second, they were χωρὶς Χριστοῦ (“without Christ.”) Because they were outside the covenant of Israel, they could not enjoy the benefits of the salvific role played by Israel’s messianic king (c.f. Rom 5:9). Third, they were ἀπελλοτριωμένοι τῆς πολιτείας τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (“alienated from the commonwealth of Israel”), strangers (ξένοι) of the covenants of promise. In the Roman Empire being a citizen came with a whole host of benefits. According to Benjamin Dunning, citizenship functioned as a category denoting “ultimate insider status.” In this context, alien and stranger language demarcated who was in the sphere of imperial blessing and who was not. In fact, Dunning notes that alien language was used to “construct the profoundly negative realm of the non-citizen.”

According to Dio Chrysostom, if one was demarcated as a non-citizen then their lives were not worth living, “many choose death rather than life after losing their citizenship” (Orations 66.15). In the Jewish mindset, being an alien to the people of God and their covenants meant to be outside the realm of God’s election and therefore outside of his salvation. Therefore, in both Roman and Jewish contexts, being an alien was a fate as bad as death and Paul is saying that this was the state of the Gentiles. Fourth, they were without hope (ἐλπίδα), which I take to be equivalent with the fifth problem, they were ἀθεοὶ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ (“without God in the world”). The Gentiles were not able to call God their “hope” (Psa. 62:5), as the Jews, for they were not bound to the only God who saves.

In verses 13–18, however, Paul reminds them how God, through Christ, brought them out of this hopeless situation. He begins with the adversative δὲ to contrast their former life with the present. Once, they were separated from Christ and the people of God, but now they have been

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98 Ibid.
brought near to God’s people by his blood (2:13). This seems to echo the “gathering together of all things in Christ” of 1:10, which I have noted is first fulfilled in the church. Through Christ’s sacrificial death, he has brought together into a unity, what once was separate. Since the church has been primarily identified as a body up to this point (1:23), the emphasis on unity in these verses makes sense because the body cannot be fragmented if it is to function properly. Next, Paul goes into a description of Christ as the peace (eirēnē) that brings harmony to Jew and Gentile. According to Gosnell Yorke, Paul’s use of eirēnē in Ephesians is an engagement with imperial ideology concerning the _Pax Romana_. Augustus secured peace in the Roman Empire through victory and this peace “was imposed on the subject peoples by means of warfare.”

If Ephesians 2:1–22 is a double-narrative about God’s victory over the powers, then the case can be made that Christ established a peace much better than the _Pax Romana_ through his victory in the cross and resurrection by defeating the powers and their attempt to divide humanity by emphasizing racial and ethnical differences.

How did he create this peace and make Jew and Gentile one? First, he preached peace to those who were ἑγγύς (“near”) and to those who were μακράν (“far off”; 2:17). Here, Paul is most likely alluding to two texts in Isaiah: 52:7, which speaks of the beauty of messengers who proclaim peace and salvation; and 57:19 which speaks of lips whose fruit is the message of peace to those far and near. Concerning this allusion, Thielman states, “Paul has skillfully combined

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100 Simmons [Peoples, 181-82] notes that Jesus was open to outsiders and had table fellowship with outcasts and sinners in the name of God. This, along with his affirmation of the marginalized and disenfranchised, “birthed an extraordinary vision of God that engendered the transcending of barriers based on ethnicity and tradition.” Simmons further surmises that this view of Jesus promoted the Hellenistic Jews in the early church (such as Stephen and the seven in Acts 6) to “go beyond the ethnic and religious boundaries that helped define the Judaism of their day” and make room for the Gentiles in the community of God. In Ephesians 2, Paul shows that he agreed with the Hellenists on this point.
the wording of these two texts to make the double peace of 57:29 the object of the herald’s glad proclamation.”

Second, he broke down τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ (“the dividing wall of hostility”; 2:14), that is, the hostility that stood in between Jew and Gentile. Here, Paul in his use of “the dividing wall of hostility” is probably alluding to the physical barrier that stood between ‘the court of Israel’ and the ‘court of the Gentiles’ in the Jerusalem temple. Gentiles were not allowed to breach this partition on pain of death and it symbolized the enmity that existed between the two groups and the Jewish view that the Gentiles were excluded from God’s presence.

Though this may be the case, Paul is probably using the phrase primarily to refer to the Jewish Law, which the practice thereof distinguished between Jew and Gentile, as both a “dividing wall” and a “fence” that enclosed the Jewish people against Gentile influence.

This idea is affirmed in the second thing that Christ did to make peace, that is, abolishing τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν (“the law of commandments and ordinances” 2:15).

Here, Paul is not trying to say that the Jewish Law, in and of itself, was evil. This cannot be the case because he himself quotes from the Law in the paraenesis (e.g. 6:1; c.f. Rom. 7:12). Rather, Paul

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101 Thielman, “Ephesians,” 817. On 57:19, the terms “far” and “near” are frequently taken to mean Jews within geographical Israel and to the Jews of the Diaspora respectively [e.g. Hoehner, Ephesians, 365; Lincoln, “The Use of the OT in Ephesians,” JSNT 14 (1988): 27 (16-57).] In contrast, Thorsten Moritz [A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians (Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 85. Leiden: Brill, 1996), 32-34] argues that a reference to the Gentiles probably at least stands in the background and may be the primary meaning of the text and it seems that Paul understood the passage in this way.


103 Thielman, Ephesians, 166.

104 According to Brian S. Rosner [Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God (New Studies in Biblical Theology 31. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 77], καταργεῖν is a “favorite word for Paul to describe what Christ does to the law. Its strength in this context [Eph. 2:11–18] can hardly be missed, as it sits in company with ‘tearing down’ and ‘putting to death.’ In 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul uses it in the passive voice to say that the Law of Moses has been ‘set aside’, with its ‘ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets.’ Similarly, in Romans 7:6 believers have been ‘discharged from the law,’ just as a wife is ‘discharged from the law concerning the husband when her husband dies. In each of these cases someone is released from the obligations to obey certain laws and is free from the sanctions of disobedience of those laws.”
is referring to the two-fold function of the Law that: (i) clearly separated Jew from Gentiles, especially through its food and purity rules; and (ii) condemned both Jew and Gentile’s transgression before God.\(^\text{105}\) Both the “breaking down” and “abolishing” comes about ἐν τῇ σαρκί αὐτοῦ (“in his flesh”). It is best to interpret this phrase in light of 2:13, which states that the Gentiles have been brought near “by the blood” of Christ, as a reference to the crucifixion. On the cross, Christ’s blood was spilt and his body was broken to enact reconciliation between humanity and God and between Jew and Gentile.\(^\text{106}\) If God was going to form Jew and Gentile into his community of new creation, then there could not be anything between them that would tear them apart. The new creation community is supposed to embody the character of God in the world. And, since God is not fragmented, then his community cannot be either.

But the question must be asked of Paul in this section, “Now that Jew and Gentile have been brought together, what is the result? Who are they?” For my thesis’ sake, it would be helpful if Paul utilized embodiment imagery in his answer to this question, which, thankfully, he does. Paul’s answer is that due to the breaking down of any division between them, Jew and Gentile have been made into ἕνα καινὸν ἄνθρωπον (“one new humanity”; 2:15) and ἑνὶ σώματι (“one body”; 2:16), and have access to the Father in ἑνὶ πνεύματι (“one Spirit”; 2:18). For Paul, Jew and Gentile have been unified into a totally new creation: God’s new humanity. This new humanity acts in the world as one body.\(^\text{107}\) In 1:23, Paul emphasized that this body was filled


\(^\text{106}\) An application to taking communion in church needs to be made here. Christ’s body was broken so that Jew and Gentile could be made into “one body” (2:16). When believers partake of the bread in communion, Christ’s body broken for us (Luke 22:19), they need to remember that it is a symbol of the unity of the church.

\(^\text{107}\) Best, *Ephesians*, 266. According to Terrence Donaldson [*Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostles Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 30], in Paul, the oneness of God was another main reason for the Jew and Gentile becoming one.
with Christ. Here in 2:16, Paul emphasizes the *unity* of the body. God’s new humanity is to be characterized by a state of *singular identity and purpose*. As in Romans 3:29–30, since God is *one*, his people must be *one* as well. This makes sense, in light of my thesis. If Paul’s main point in chapters 1—3, concerning the church, is that the church is created to be the physical representation of God’s character in the world, then God’s creation of the church as a *unified body* is a testament to this fact. By nature of her very makeup, the church exhibits the unity that exists in God. This is why Paul will battle against the fragmentation of the body in chapter 4 (c.f. 1 Cor. 1). Paul gives the undergirding reason for this unity in the church when he talks about the “one Spirit.” Jew and Gentile believers are *one* because they partake of *the same* indwelling Spirit that gives them access to the Father equally (c.f. Acts 10). It is the Spirit that *animates* this one body allowing it to approach God and do its work in the world.

Paul begins verse 19 with the words, ἄρα οὖν, which indicate that what is coming is probably a conclusion of what he has been saying about Jew and Gentile unification. He states that the Gentiles can be sure that they are οὐκέτι ἔστε ἔνοι καὶ πάροικοι ἅλλα ἔστε συμπολίται τῶν ἁγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ (“no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God”; 2:19). The word, συμπολίται, strengthens the *unity* of the one body by recognizing that the Gentiles, who once did not belong to God’s people, now “belong as fellow-citizens with the rest of believers in that heavenly commonwealth ruled by God” (c.f. Phil. 1:27).

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108 Gordon D. Fee [*God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 684-85] argues that ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι should be taken as a locative. He states that it resembles 1 Cor. 12:13 in which all believers are ‘immersed’ in the one Spirit so as to form the one body of Christ. “For Paul, it is the common experience of the one Spirit, by Jew and Gentile alike, that attests that God has created something new in the body of Christ. Thus, the one Spirit who has formed them into the one body, also brings them together as that one body into the presence of the Father. It is as they live together in the common sphere of the Spirit that they have entrée with God.”

closer relationship between God and Gentile believers than that of ruler-citizen: that of Father-child. He has just written about the glorious access to the Father that both Gentiles and Jews enjoy through Christ in the Spirit (2:18) and has written earlier in chapter 1 that believers have been adopted into God’s family (1:5). In fact, Paul, later, will state that God is the archetypical father figure (3:14–15; 4:6). The point, here, is that the Gentiles are no longer aliens without a home. They are “at home” in God’s family.110

In verse 20, Paul changes his imagery again from the body as family to the body as the new temple. He describes this temple as built on θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν (“the foundation of the apostles and prophets”). The ἀποστόλων refer to the people who first took the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles—people such as Barnabas, Timothy, Silvanus, Apollos, and Paul himself. The prophets refer, not to the OT prophets, but to those within the NT church through whom the Spirit inspired to speak incisively to particular individuals (1 Cor. 14:24–25) or to the church (Acts 11:27–30) and to direct the movement of the church outward to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1–3; 15:22).111

Next, he describes the building’s relationship to Christ. Christ is the ἀκρογωνιαῖος of the building. I have left this word untranslated because of the difficulty in interpreting it. It could refer to the stone that is at the foundation’s most distant corner providing stability to the rest of the project. This is the way most modern translations view it when they translate it as “cornerstone” (e.g. NRSV, NASB, ESV, NIV). It could also refer, however, to the stone that

110 Ibid., 212. According to M. Y. MacDonald [“The Politics of Identity in Ephesians,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26 (2004): 441], the language of the “household of God must have had a powerful impact among believers, for it linked the experience of salvation to the actual physical gathering place of church groups.” Home-owners would often open up their homes and families to their true spiritual family to gather and fellowship.

111 Thielman, *Ephesians*, 180. This conclusion becomes more explicit in 3:5–6 when Paul links the inclusion of the Gentiles with a previously unknown mystery now revealed “by the Spirit to the holy apostles and prophets.”
crowns the top of the building once it is finished. I suggest that Paul has both meanings in mind when using the word. As Thielman puts it, “Paul may have intended the metaphor to show Christ’s importance as anchoring and guiding the growth of the church...[and] to encompass Christ’s role as “head over all things” and his role as the head toward which the body grows. He is paradoxically, the ‘topmost foundation stone.’”112 This is vital to the theme of divine embodiment because Christ’s body cannot function without its foundation or head. It is only through its subordination to and reliance on Christ that the body can embody his character and actions to the world.

On the basis of this stone, the whole building, συναρμολογουμένη (“being fitted together”) is growing εἰς ναὸν ἄγιον ἐν κυρίῳ (“into a holy temple in the Lord”; 2:21)113 and is being built together into κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι (“a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”; 2:22). When Paul talks about the whole building “being fitted together,” one cannot help but think of Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning the Dry Bones (Ezek. 37), in which scattered dry bones—representing the deadness of Israel—are commanded by God to come together, grow new skin and sinew, form a human body, be filled with breath (referring to the Holy Spirit), come to life, and live once again as God’s people on earth.114 In Ephesians 2:21, Paul is saying

112 Ibid., 183.

113 O. Michel, “ναός,” Theological Dictionary of the New Testament 4:880, 86. He literally renders in traditional Greek ναός, as “abode of the gods” in Paul’s statement to the Corinthians that they are the temple of God and that God’s Spirit dwells in them, he assumes that Corinthians are familiar with this concept. In Philo the metaphor of the soul as God’s house is common, (e.g. De Somniis. I, 149).

114 Robert H. Suh [“The Use of Ezekiel 37 in Ephesians 2,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 50.4 (December 2007): 719-20] notices the connection between Ephesians 2 and Ezekiel 37. Concerning the relationship, he states, “Although Ezekiel 37 and Ephesians 2 each has its own distinctive historical context, even at first glance it is quite recognizable that the messages of both chapters run topically parallel. The thrust of Ezekiel 37 is that Judah and Israel will become one under the divine leadership, with the Law being observed and followed. The thrust of Ephesians 2 is that Jews and Gentiles have become one in a new creation, through the redemptive event of Christ, with the Law being superseded.”
that Jew and Gentile come together as one body to function as the dwelling place for God on earth.

Paul mixes his metaphors here by talking about a building, a non-living substance, that is “growing” (αὔξει), which language normally refers to living organisms. According to Gombis, he is using this mixed metaphor to describe dual realities: “God has already established his church, and he is growing it into what it is supposed to be…God is caring for and cultivating the church of Jesus Christ maturing communities of Jesus followers into the shape of Jesus Christ and expanding the scope of redemption around the world.”¹¹⁵ I would add to this that Paul uses the “growing” metaphor in relation to the building because he has already described this building primarily as a body. Human bodies constantly grow from the time they are born, becoming more mature. In the same way, the body of Christ grows in its maturity over time. And if the body is meant to represent God physically by the indwelling power and presence of the Holy Spirit, then it can be said to be a temple to God. In the OT, the temple, the house of God, was regarded as the throne of God and the locus of his presence with his people. Per Gombis, ANE peoples would often gather at their deity’s temple to worship and celebrate, “This act was symbolic of what they imagined was happening in the heavenly realm; their god just defeated the god of the nation they conquered.”¹¹⁶ In Ephesians, however, God’s people do not gather at the temple, they gather “as the temple of the victorious Christ Jesus,” where God truly dwells among his people.¹¹⁷ The phrase ἐν πνεύματι refers not to the builder of the building, but to the way in which God will dwell in this temple. God will fill the new temple with his presence by indwelling his people

¹¹⁵ Gombis, Drama, 105.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 104.
¹¹⁷ Ibid. Emphasis added.
with the Holy Spirit. This perfectly describes divine embodiment. If the body of Christ functions as a temple indwelled by the Spirit, then wherever she goes and whatever she does in the world, she carries with her the very presence of God, which enables her to act out of divine character.

The Apostolic Mystery and Paul’s Ministry (3:1–13)

After telling the story of God’s victory over the powers and of his rescuing and unifying the new humanity, Paul begins another intercessory prayer specifically for his Gentile readers that they truly would realize their mission to embody God’s presence in the world. After acknowledging himself as a δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ ("a prisoner of Christ Jesus"; 3:1) on behalf of the Gentiles, Paul immediately digresses from his prayer to a discussion of his God-originated commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He states that God revealed (ἀποκαλύπτω) to him, along with his fellow apostles and prophets, by the Spirit a mystery (μυστήριον) that had been hidden from humanity in ages past (3:5). Per Sigur Grindheim, “by employing the term ‘mystery,’ Paul emphasizes that the Christ event is the fulfillment of something that is planned by God, something that was previously unknown, but now proclaimed.”¹¹⁸ He admits that it is about this mystery that he has been talking in chapters 1 and 2, however, just in case his readers missed it, he comes out and defines it clearly. The mystery is:

τὰ ἑθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ("that the Gentiles are joint-heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel"; 3:6).

¹¹⁸ Sigur Grindheim, “What the OT Prophets Did Not Know: The Mystery of the Church in Eph 3, 2–13,” *Biblica* 84 (2003): 532. This is consistent with the use of the term in the OT, especially in the book of Daniel, where the term “mystery” is used for something kept secret and subsequently revealed (Dan. 2:18-19, 28-30, 47; 4:6). Thielman, “Ephesians,” 819, notes that Paul’s use of “revealed” and “mystery” seem closely related to Daniel 2 in the LXX in which the “God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ ἀποκαλύπτων μυστήρια) provides Daniel both with the details of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and with its interpretation (2:27–30).
The first term Paul uses here to describe the Gentiles is συγκληρονόμα, which refers to the inheritance of the people of God. Ephesians has made it clear that God’s people await a glorious existence in the eschatological new creation as God’s adopted children (1:5, 13–14, 2:10, 15; 3:9). While references are replete in Second Temple Judaism to the inclusion of the Gentiles in YHWH worship in the eschatological restoration of Israel, the full equality of Jew and Gentile as a newly constituted humanity was foreign to them (e.g. Psa. 2: 8–9 LXX; Psa. Sol. 17:22–25). The second term Paul uses is σύσσωμα. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, through Christ’s death on the cross, Jew and Gentile have been made into a new humanity that is the physical agent by which the exalted Christ accomplishes his will in the world, which Paul calls the body of Christ. Here, Paul is re-emphasizing that the Gentiles are members of this unified people of God. The final phrase, συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας refers to the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that the Gentiles would be blessed through him (Gen. 22:18; c.f. Gal. 3:8; Rom. 4:13), which Paul connects with the receiving of the Spirit in Galatians 3:14. Finally, Paul notes that these things have happened to the Gentiles because, once again, they are ἐν Χριστῷ. God’s ultimate intention is to “gather together all things” in Christ (1:10) and this has begun to be a reality by the inclusion of believing Gentiles into the new humanity along with believing Jews. The emphasis in the last sentence is on believing because only

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119 According to Jarvis J. Williams [“Violent Ethno-Racial Reconciliation; A Mystery in Ephesians and Its Jewish Martyrological Background,” Criswell Theological Review 12.2 (Spring 2015): 126], the mystery cannot simply refer to Gentile inclusion in the promises of Israel. This was already acknowledged in the OT by Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 18:18 and reiterated in texts like Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6 as well as numerous second temple texts. For example, 1 Enoch 48:4 even states that the Son of Man is the light of the Gentiles. The Testament of Levi states that the Lord will visit the Gentiles with his mercy (4:4). The Testament of Benjamin claims in 10:5 that the Lord will reveal salvation to the Gentiles. “Instead, the mystery is that God would include the Gentiles by establishing a spiritualized commonwealth of Israel as a new ethno-racial community.” I would say that this new community is the body of Christ.
through belief in the content of gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου) are Gentile, or Jew, united in Christ.¹²⁰

After defining the mystery, Paul reiterates that God has given to him the grace of bringing the news of this revelation to the Gentiles (3:7–9).¹²¹ This, in essence, means that “when Paul preaches, God creates the church,” because the church is composed of both Jews and Gentiles.¹²² The reason for his commission is so that γνωρισθῇ νῦν τὰς ἁρχαὶ καὶ τὰς ἐξουσίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ (“through the church, the multi-faceted wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places”; 3:10). Thus, here, Paul explicitly states the purpose, or calling, of the church: she is meant to embody God’s wisdom to the powers. This accords perfectly with my thesis. Through the creation of the church, the union of formerly divided races into multiracial living body, God has confounded the evil powers, who have “ordered the present evil age in such a way as to exacerbate the divisions within humanity (2:11–12),” by his “multi-faceted wisdom”.¹²³ As

¹²⁰ Best, Ephesians, 313. He states further that if ‘the gospel’ is taken to indicate its content we should have to take ‘in Christ Jesus’ as denoting the spiritual sphere within which Jews and Gentiles are fellow heirs.”

¹²¹ William A. Simmons [A Theology of Inclusion in Jesus and Paul: The God of Outcasts and Sinners (Mellen Biblical Press Series 39, Lewiston: Mellen Biblical Press, 1996), 125-27], points out how Paul’s calling significantly motivated his mission to the Gentiles. Even while a violent persecutor of the church and a person who rejected “the theology that motivated the Hellenists to receive Gentiles, Paul experienced the unmitigated grace of God.” Simmons argues that such an experience of God, “mandated a fundamental change in Paul’s perception of God, his understanding of what God required and his assessment of who constituted the people of God. His righteousness does not depend on his people’s ability to comply with certain religious observances or upon one’s moral status, God’s righteousness leads him to dismantle all barriers and to remove all impediments to his grace.” Simmons concludes, “Paul now accepted that God had chosen to impart the riches of his grace to the outcasts and sinners of this world. God’s gracious provision of ‘rightness’ to the unworthy effectively negated distinctions between Jews and Gentiles...Paul came to realize that if he were to remain true to God as he now perceived him, he too must seek to realize God’s grace in the lives of outcasts and sinners. The path he was to take in actualizing this calling was already blazed by those who he persecuted. From henceforth he too would serve the God who justifies the ungodly by bringing the gospel to the Gentiles, accepting them as they were without first requiring them to become Jews.”

¹²² Gombis, Drama, 116.

¹²³ Ibid., 117. G. E. Sterling (“From Apostle to the Gentiles to Apostle of the Church: Images of Paul at the End of the First Century.” Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft unnd die Kunde des Urchristentums 99
the church lives as the body of Christ on earth, representing God and his nature, she becomes “the medium through which this wisdom is revealed.” Paul states that this is consistent with God’s eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus (3:11–12). He ends the digression by encouraging the readers not to despair over his sufferings for them. Because, out of a seemingly weak and defeated position, God has used Paul’s commission and imprisonment to attain salvation and future glory for the Gentiles (3:13).

Paul’s Second Intercession: The Church as the Fullness of God (3:14–21)

After the digression, Paul restarts his intercession on his knees (τὰ γόνατά) before the Father on behalf of the Gentile believers (3:14–15). Considering what I have mentioned already about the importance of prayer for discerning a person’s desires for another, it will be important to give great attention to what Paul is praying for his readers in this passage. He asks that God, ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριῶ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς Ὀνομάζεται (“from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name”), would grant that they would δυνάμει κραταιῶθηναι διὰ τοῦ

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125 Weedman (“New Perspective Reading,” 89) states that Paul’s combining mystery and plan together is further indication that he is using the terms to refer to an eternal strategy of using Israel with the ultimate purpose of incorporating the Gentiles into his ‘elect’ and through this new ‘elect’ to bring unity to the universe.

126 According to Gombis [*Drama*, 108-10], by saying that God is accomplishing his cosmic plan through his position of weakness, Paul intends to function as a model for his readers on how to live out God’s triumph in their communities and lives as individuals. In a sense, Paul is doing exactly what he wants the church to do. He is embodying Christ, who vanquished the powers through the ultimate position of weakness: the cross.

127 Rudiger Fuchs [*“I Kneel Before the Father and Pray for You (Ephesians 3:14): Date and Significance of Ephesians, Part 2,” European Journal of Theology* 23.2 (2014): 117] believes that Paul’s use of τὰ γόνατά is a “personal element.” Fuchs believes that, even though Ephesians is a circular letter, Paul still would have known that it was first going to Ephesus. In Acts 20:17–38, the Ephesian elders had been in Miletus praying “on their knees,” weeping. They would have been reminded of that time when they heard Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:14.
πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἐσω ἀνθρωπὸν (“be strengthened in the inner being with power through his Spirit”; 3:16). The ἐσω ἀνθρωπὸν refers to the interior life of a person. Here, since it is used in the singular, it speaks once again to the unity of the body. Paul is saying that the body of Christ, although made up of many members, has one, collective inner life that needs to be strengthened by the Spirit.\(^\text{128}\)

As a result of gaining strength from the Spirit, Paul prays that Christ would “dwell (κατοικῆσαι) in [their] hearts through faith” (3:17a). Here, he is not saying that Christ is absent from their hearts; rather, because Christ is in them, Paul desires that Christ continually be formed in them. As Carson notes, “Make no mistake, when Christ first moves into our lives, he finds us in very bad repair. It takes a great deal of power to change us, and that is why Paul prays for power. He asks that God may so strengthen us by his power in our inner being that Christ may genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a house that pervasively reflects his own character.”\(^\text{129}\) Instead of describing the church as a “house” as Carson does, I think that it is best to use the descriptor of body again because Christ is dwelling in the “heart” not just an empty room. The truth that Christ is dwelling within their hearts reinforces my embodiment thesis. The church can represent Christ physically because he, by faith through the Spirit, is the animating principle of the body allowing it to act as it needs to. It is best to interpret the next phrase, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἔρριζομένοι καὶ τεθεμελιώμενοι, as a passionate interjection on the part of the apostle, “You are rooted and grounded in love!”\(^\text{130}\) Here, Paul is stressing the foundational nature

\(^{128}\) This, of course, includes the collective inner lives of the individual members of the body. Thielman [Ephesians, 230] notes that if the readers were discouraged because of Paul’s suffering and, perhaps, because they too were suffering, then Paul is asking for inner strength and encouragement. As Paul T. Eckel [“Ephesians 3:14–21,” Interpretation 45.3 (July 1991): 284] notes, the readers needed to know the “present reality” of the truths that Paul is praying about.

\(^{129}\) Carson, Praying, 165. Emphasis added.
of Christ’s love for them. As O’Brien states, “Love is the soil in which believers are rooted and
will grow, the foundation upon which they are built.”

After praying that the readers would be strengthened to comprehend what it means for
Christ to dwell in their hearts, he gives the reason for this in 3:18–19. He desires that the
community be able: (i) καταλαβέσθαι σῶν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ
βάθος (“to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and
depth”); (ii) γνῶναι τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“to know the love
of Christ that surpasses knowledge”); so that they (iii) πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ
(“be filled to all the fullness of God”). First, the dimensional language, “breadth, length, height,
and depth,” refers primarily to the subject of the following clause, “the love of Christ.” Christ’s
love for the believers “surpasses knowledge,” but Paul believes that the readers would benefit
greatly by comprehending as much as they possibly can. As Michael Gorman notes, “He [Paul]
prays in this way so that the church’s imagination will be stretched and its corporate jaw be
found wide open in amazement.”

If the church is to live a life characterized by embodying
Christ’ love (5:1), then the church needs to truly comprehend this love. Secondarily, the
language also could be remembering the vast wisdom and love of God that Paul has been
describing in the last 2 chapters.

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130 Thielman, Ephesians, 232. This is similar syntactically to the outburst at the end of 2:5 “by grace you
have been saved!”

131 O’Brien, Ephesians, 260.

132 Michael J. Gorman, Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,
2015), 195.

133 M. Y. MacDonald, Colossians and Ephesians (Sacra Pagina 17; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press,
2000), 277.
Second, the ultimate goal toward which all of the intercession, and I submit all of chapters 1—3, has been building is that the readers, as Christ’s body, would be πληρωθῇ εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ (“filled to all the fullness of God”3:19b). It is in this goal that Paul’s vision of the church is seen as the embodiment of the presence of God on earth. In multiple places in the OT, the tabernacle and temple are said to be “filled with God’s glory” (e.g. Exod. 40:34–35; 2 Chr. 2:1–7; Ezek. 10:3–4, 18–19). Robert Foster claims that Paul is drawing on this Jewish tradition to say that the church “functions as a dwelling place, a holy temple, to God.”134 The difference, however, is that the temple in Israel was stationary and people had to travel there to encounter God’s presence. In Ephesians, however, Paul describes the church as a living, moving body that carries in her heart the presence of Christ, who is the fullness of God, wherever she goes. If the church is to embody God to the world, which is her calling, then they must ever be filled with Christ and his love. This is what Paul so desperately wants for his readers. So, he asks the only one who with the ability to “over and abundantly” grant his request (3:20).

**Theological Conclusion**

Based on the exegesis of Ephesians 1—3, I submit that two theological affirmations can be concluded concerning the nature of the church’s calling according to Paul.

1. The Church is the Body of Christ

The predominant motif in Ephesians that Paul uses to describe the church is “the body” of Christ (1:23; 2:16; 3:6). In the exegesis, I have interpreted this image incarnationally to mean that, based on its union with Christ, the church is the physical presence of Christ on earth, whom

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is called to represent his character, wisdom, and authority to the evil powers and to her fellow humanity. This idea fits with how Paul normally thinks about God the Father. In the two prayers in Ephesians, Paul refers to God as the “Father” (1:17; 3:14) “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” (3:15). By stating that God is “Father,” Paul is acknowledging God as the transcendent source of all things created, which was a common ascription in Greek and Roman thought.135 Unlike the thought of his day, however, Paul, in imitation of Jesus (Matt. 6:9–13; 7:11) used “Father” to also speak of God’s desire for intimacy and relationship with his creation. In the OT, God’s desire for relationship with his creation is seen in making it reflect his divine attributes (Rom. 1:20), which is particularly seen in the creation of humanity in his own image (Gen 1:27). By doing this, God created a rational, relational, and volitional being that could respond to him in relationship and reflect his glory and dominion in the physical world. The outworking of this relationship happened when God walked in the garden with humanity: he dwelled among them (Gen. 3). For Paul, however, Adam’s sin and rebellion distorted this relationship and humanity’s reflection of God, which resulted in creation being subject to corruption and death.136 The rest of the OT relates God’s attempt to represent the fullness of the image of God in humanity through his elect people Israel, who, because of their sinful natures, constantly failed to do this accurately (Isa. 49:6). What Israel, and all of creation needed, was to be recreated in the image of God: they needed a new Adam.

Thus, according to God’s eternal plan, the Son of God became united with his creation by becoming incarnate as a human being (Phil. 2:5–11).137 Paul proclaims that Jesus the Messiah is

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136 N. T. Wright, Paul in Fresh Perspective (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 35.
the new Adam and the image of God (Rom. 5; Col. 1) through whom God was walking, yet again, on earth amidst his creation. As Adam’s disobedience brought sin, death, and judgment to the creation, Christ, through his obedience on earth, death, and resurrection, brought eternal life and righteousness to it.\(^{138}\) The grace of Christ is so powerful that it reverses the downward spiral initiated by Adam and makes human beings whole and holy persons.\(^{139}\) Humanity does so much more than reap the benefits of Christ’s life, however, for through faith in Christ, humanity is united with him in such a way that they become a new creation created in his image (2 Cor. 5:15–21; Gal. 6:14–15; C.f. Rom. 6:1–7).

For Paul, this new creation is *the body of Christ*, which takes the place of Christ’s physical body on earth after his exaltation to glory. Paul uses the body of Christ metaphor in Rom. 12:1–8 and 1 Cor. 12: 12–16 to describe the diversity within the unity that is the church.\(^{140}\) All of the members, with their various gifts and talents support and build up the one body of Christ.\(^{141}\) Ephesians takes this one step further (I believe that Ephesians is the pinnacle of the image of body), by saying what the role and goal of this united body is to embody God through her proclamation and practices in the world (3:10, 19).\(^{142}\) This is the fullest expression of God’s

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137 Dunn [*Theology*, 205] believes that in Colossians 1:15–20; 2:11–15, also, the incarnation of the eternal Son was in Paul’s mind and was “struggling to come to expression.”


141 According to J. Paul Sampley [*Walking in Love: Moral Progress and Spiritual Growth with the Apostle Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 71], the one body/many members metaphor gives Paul “an almost palpable way of interpreting how we as believers ought to relate to and care for one another.”

142 Ben Witherington III, *New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Vol. 1; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 238-9. He states, “The goal of salvation is not merely the new birth or new creation of people; it is the full conformity of Christ’s people to Christ’s image, as a text such as Romans 8:29 makes clear, a full conformity that is
desire for intimacy with his creation. God unites himself with new humanity, now made up of Gentile as well as Jew, by the Spirit and walks, again, in the world through the church to redeem the rest of creation and bring it back into relationship and unity with himself, which will happen fully in the eschaton (Eph. 1:10).

2. This Body is the Dwelling Place of God, Filled with the Spirit

Although Ephesians predominantly recognizes the church as body, Paul also describes this body as a temple that is growing into a dwelling place for God (2:21). The temple as the dwelling place of God was a major theme within the OT. The Garden of Eden was a temple in the first creation. According to G. K. Beale, as the temple in Israel was where the priest experienced God’s unique presence, Eden was the place where Adam experienced it, thereby making him YHWH’s first priest. In the command to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28), God is telling Adam to expand the temple so that God’s presence would fill the earth. Because of Adam’s sin, however, he lost this role and it passed onto the patriarchs, who likewise failed in this task (Gen 9:1; 17:2, 6; 26:4; 35:11–12). The establishment of Israel’s tabernacle and temple was an attempt to re-establish the Garden sanctuary of Eden because in them, God’s unique presence dwelt among his covenant people who were to function as a “kingdom of priests” (Exod. 19:6), bearing God’s revelation to the nations. Instead of viewing the temple as a symbol of this task, however, the people of Israel viewed it as a symbol of their election and unique right to the presence of God, which led to the exclusion of any thought of Gentile inclusion.

not consummated until the believer is raised from the dead and is conformed in the flesh as he or she has already been conformed in the spirit to the image of Christ.”

144 Ibid., 623.
145 Ibid., 632.
This pattern of failure came to a sudden halt in the incarnation of Christ. “Christ is the
temple toward which all earlier temples looked and that they anticipated” because Christ is the
epitome of God’s presence on earth as God incarnate.\(^{146}\) Now, according to Paul, it is Jesus’
followers who are the temple of God because they have been indwelled with the Spirit (1 Cor.
3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:16 – 18).\(^{147}\) As the “abiding presence of God that governs the life of the
believer (Rom. 8:1 – 17),” the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9) is the fullness of God by which the
church is filled (Eph. 3:19) and the body of Christ is animated.\(^{148}\) In Ephesians 3, Paul quotes
from Isaiah 57, a prophecy of Israel’s return from captivity, which Paul understands to have had
initial fulfilment in Jews and Gentiles turning in faith to Christ, the true Israelite inheritance.\(^{149}\)
Beale explains, “It is no coincidence that the verses preceding Isaiah 57:19 also speak of Israel’s
restoration in terms of them returning to dwell in God’s temple as a new resurrected creation
(57:13–15).” This argument is strengthened further by Isaiah 56:3–8’s statement that both Jew
and Gentile will worship together in God’s temple in the new age. Paul envisions the body of
Christ as the beginning of this eschatological temple prophesied by Isaiah.\(^{150}\) As a living, moving
tabernacle, filled with the presence of God, the church becomes the embodying light of God’s
presence to the nations that ethnic Israel never was. This is exactly what Paul wants his readers

\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995),
206-08. This includes both the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 3) and individual believers (1 Cor. 6:19). This type of
thinking can also be seen in the gospel of John 17:18, 20:21. According to James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling
Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 1; Nashville: B & H
the disciples after Jesus goes away is that the Spirit continues Jesus’ presence.” Jesus dwells in believers through
the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and thus makes them the locus of God’s presence on earth.


\(^{149}\) G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 262.
to understand about themselves and what he wants them to apply to their lives, so, he moves on in his letter, in chapters 4—6, to instruct them on how to live out the church’s role in their lives.
Chapter 3

Divine Embodiment Lived Out in Ephesians 4—6

In chapters 1—3, Paul told the magnificent story of God’s victory in Christ over the evil powers that had enslaved humanity and also explained how the church, as God’s new humanity, has a vital role to play in the complete actualization of this victory on earth. This role is that the church would embody God and his purposes in the world so that the powers would be confounded and creation made new. This is truly an answer to Jesus’ prayer, “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). In chapters 4—6, Paul lists some specific ways in which the church can walk out this role in their context. Thus, I submit that the moral commands in the paraenesis are grounded in the theological narrative that Paul has given in chapters 1—3.

In this chapter, I hope to show how the divine embodiment theme makes sense of the specific moral commands Paul chose to give in these chapters.

Walk Worthy of your Calling: 4:1–16 as the Hinge of the Letter

In 4:1, Paul begins the paraenesis of his letter with the transitional phrase, παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς (“I urge you”), which is a common phrase Paul uses to shift from theology to ethics. He

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152 Troels Engberg-Pedersen [“The Concept of Paraenesis,” in Early Christian Paraenesis in Context (J. Starr and T. Engberg-Pedersen eds.; Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der alten Kirche 125; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 65-66], in his excellent summary of Paul’s concept of paraenesis, states that there are both Jewish and Stoic backgrounds to Paul’s concept here. He states that in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, time and time again the patriarch’s will recount a life experience and then spell out in imperative form its precise import for his listeners (T. Reu. 4:1, 5; Zeb. 5:1, 3; Dan 5:1; Gad 6:1; Jos. 10:1–2, 11:1). Also, Seneca claimed that precepts depend logically on doctrines, which constitute their cause (Epistles, 95.12).

153 Paul uses ὑμᾶς as a signal for this transition in 1 Thessalonians 5:5–6; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 2:1; Romans 6:12; Colossians 3:5–6; Ephesians 6:14. Twice, Paul uses this specific phrase, παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς in 1 Corinthians 4:15–16; Romans 12:1.
repeats himself (3:1) by calling himself a “prisoner for the Lord” reminding them, again, of his apostolic authority and mission, and the gravity of the requests he is making. The exhortation that he gives focuses on the interpretive question of this study. He urges them to ἀξίως περιπατῆσαι τῆς κλῆσεως ἡς ἐκλήθητε ("walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called"; 4:1). 154 I have shown in my exegesis of 1—3 that τῆς κλῆσεως ἡς ἐκλήθητε refers to the church’s calling to embody God and his purposes in the world. 155 Paul is wanting their way of life to be consistent with this calling. In 4:2–3, he tells them the attitude with which they are to carry out their calling. They are to do this with ταπεινοφροσύνης καὶ πραΰτητος μετὰ μακροθυμίας ἀνεχόμενοι ἄλληλον ἐν ἀγάπῃ (“with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love”). 156 Each of these attitudes can be summed up under the next attitude, σπουδάζοντες τηρεῖν τὴν ἑνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος ἐν τῷ συνδέσμῳ τῆς εἰρήνης (“eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”). Paul has already spoken about the ideas of “peace” and “unity” in 2:14–18, in which it is said that Jesus brought peace between Jew and Gentile and between humanity and God. This peace must not be broken. If the church is going to function as God’s body in the world, then all parts must be unified. 157 As Paul mentioned

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154 According to David E. Garland, “A Life Worthy of the Calling: Unity and Holiness Ephesians 4:1-24.” Review and Expositor 76.4 (Fall 1979): 517, ἀξίως was used to mean, “to bring up the other beam of the scales into equilibrium,” “to put things in their proper balance.” Thus the readers’ walk needs to be in proper balance with their calling. As he notes, “while we can never be worthy of our calling we can respond worthily.”

155 As Pereira [“Ecclesiology,” 11] states, “The church is the entity where God’s presence is acknowledged and realized, and the first responsibility of the church to society is to show that glorious presence among them.”

156 According to Thomas B. Slater [Ephesians (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2012), 106], this is where Paul’s connection with Stoicism ends. Humility and patience would have been considered weaknesses, if not vices in Greco-Roman society. “The cardinal Roman virtues, garnered mostly from Stoicism, were courage, justice, moderation, and wisdom (Diogenes Laertius, Zeno 7.126). However, within second temple Judaism humility, gentleness, and patience had become well-established virtues (e.g. 1QS 4:2–5).

157 James W. Thompson, The Church According to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 213, notes that “whereas the undisputed letters of Paul call for the unity of the local congregation, Ephesians and Colossians challenge the readers to recognize that the ethnic diversity
elsewhere, each member of the body must be working alongside the others for the church to be able to successfully fulfill her role in God’s plan (c.f. 1 Cor. 12:12–31).

This unity does not derive from similarities within the group that make it natural for them to just “get along”; instead, it is theologically grounded. In 4:4–6, Paul states a series of “ones” (ἕς) in which the unity of the church is founded: (i) ἕν σώμα (“one body”); (ii) ἕν πνεῦμα (“one Spirit”); (iii) ἕν μιᾷ ἑλπίδι τῆς κλήσεως ύμῶν (“one hope of your calling”); (iv) εἷς κύριος (“one Lord”); (v) μία πίστις (“one faith”); (vi) ἕν βάπτισμα (“one baptism”); and (vii) εἷς θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ πάντων ὁ ἐπὶ πάντων καὶ διὰ πάντων καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν (“one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”).

Gordon Fee’s comments are insightful concerning these “ones”:

In making this bold assertion, particularly in the context of the one Spirit and one Lord, Paul emphasizes his readers’ own “oneness” in terms of both their origins and what it means for them to be one body in Christ. The one Spirit has formed them into the one body and also has “sealed” them as belonging to God, thus guaranteeing their future (1:13–14); so his readers’ “one hope” is also associated with the “one Spirit.” Associated with the one Lord is their “one faith” and “one baptism,” the common denominator for both Jewish and Gentile incorporation of the many house churches has become transformed into the unity of one people. A plurality of churches that are isolated from each other would be an absurd thought for Ephesians.

According to Paul Tribelco, The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 94-95, early Christians in Ephesus met in house churches that did not often meet together. Because of this, it would have been easy to focus only on one’s house and or think one’s own house church was better than others. But Paul is telling them that the churches need to be unified.

Barth, Ephesians, 429, believed that 4:4–6 was an independent liturgical fragment. See also Malcom L. Warford, “The Hope of Our Calling: Thinking about Ministry in the Context of Ephesians 1—4:16,” Lexington Theological Quarterly 37.1-2 (2002): 45, who believes that this might have been first spoken in the context of worship, and perhaps, a baptismal liturgy that authorized men and women into the Christian life. This could be the case, but I do not know how we would know this for sure. It seems to me that along with Perkins, this appears to be an ad hoc creation from standard Pauline expressions (c.f. 1 Cor. 12:12–13; 8:6). Paul is just putting his theology into creedal form.

Perkins [Ephesians, 96] notes that this phrase was a Greek philosophical formulation for the creative activity of God (e.g. Pseudo-Aristotle, On the Origin of the World 6.397b). This is not the God of the philosophers that Paul is talking about, however, as Fee [Empowering, 702] states, it is “one of the more certain and specific Trinitarian passages in the corpus.”
into the body of Christ. And all of this takes place within the framework of the one God, who is the Father of all and through whom all things exist.\textsuperscript{161}

The body’s unity does not mean, however, that there is no diversity within the body. In fact, in 4:7, Paul states that \textit{each member} of the church was given a special grace \textit{katà tò métron tής δώρεας τοῦ Χριστοῦ} (“according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”)\textsuperscript{162} In 4:8, Paul gives scriptural support for this claim and cites Psalm 68:18, \textit{ἀναβὰς εἰς υψὸς ἂχμαλώτευσεν αἰχμαλωσίαν ἐδοκεν δόματα τοῖς ἄνθρωποῖς} (“When he ascended on High, he led captive a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men”). By using this quotation, Paul is picturing the exalted Christ leading the conquered, evil powers into captivity after their defeat on the cross. With the defeat of the powers, Christ then turns and gives gifts to the new humanity he has created.\textsuperscript{163}

Verses 9–10 give further explanation to this occurrence. Paul states that if Christ ascended into his exalted state, then that must mean that he has already descended into the \textit{τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς}. There is debate over Paul’s use of the genitive \textit{τῆς γῆς} in this verse. If it is a partitive genitive, then we could translate it as “the lower regions \textit{of the earth}” (NASB, RSV, HCSB), which could refer to Christ’s descending into the grave after the cross. If we take the genitive appositionally, however, then we could translate it as “the lower regions, \textit{the earth}”

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{161} Fee, \textit{Christology}, 355.
\item \textsuperscript{162} Liefield [\textit{Ephesians}, 100] states, “The way by which Christ through his gifts, brings about unity and maturity is, remarkably, through individuality.”
\item \textsuperscript{163} According to Timothy G. Gombis [“Cosmic Lordship and Divine Gift-Giving: Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4:8,” \textit{Novum Testamentum} 47 (2005): 374-75], Paul is “appropriating the narrative movement of the entire Psalm,” not simply citing one verse in abstraction. In this psalm, YHWH conquers his enemies, proceeds to his throne, and receives tribute from his people (68:18). Then he turns and gifts his people and is praised for this (68:35). “In this manner, the author portrays Christ as the victorious Divine Warrior who has the right to give gifts to men.” Simmons [\textit{Peoples}, 288-89] states that this text also has the patron/client relationship in its background. Here, Jesus becomes the model of true giving for the believer. “By helping the poor, the Christian reflects the character of God…The goal of Christian giving, however, is not to build up one’s client base as in the classical patron-client relationships of the first century. Rather, the intent is to be like God in the service of one’s neighbor without any thought of being paid back.”
\end{itemize}
(ESV), which could refer to the incarnation itself. These two options are equally favorable grammatically and both true theologically. Since Ephesians is a narrative of divine warfare, however, and Paul viewed Christ’s victory as coming through his death on the cross and resurrection, then it seems the former option should be preferred. Thus, the “descending” refers to Christ’s descent into the grave after his victory on the cross. To be exalted, Christ needed to die and be buried. But then he rose from the dead and was exalted to heaven so that πληρώσῃ τὰ πάντα (“he might fill all things”), which refers back to God’s ultimate goal to “gather together all things in Christ” (1:10).

In verses 11–16, Paul describes the gifts and the goal behind their giving. Instead of the “spiritual gifts” given to the saints by the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12, in Ephesians, the church has been given gifted ministers: τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους τοὺς δὲ προφήτας τοὺς δὲ ἐυαγγελιστὰς τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (“some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers”). The reason why these ministers have been given is two-fold. First, it is so that the saints would be equipped (καταρτισμὸς) to do the work of the service (διακονία). Second, they are given for the building up (οἰκοδομὴ) of the body of Christ. As

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164 For a discussion of the many ways that this phrase has been interpreted see W. Hall Harris III, *The Descent of Christ: Ephesians 4:7–11 and Traditional Hebrew Imagery* (Biblical Studies Library; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 193.

165 According to O’Brien [*Ephesians*, 298-300], “apostles and prophets” refer to those to whom God gave the grace to proclaim the revealed mystery of Christ. “Evangelists” refer to those who preached the gospel. Pastors are those who exercised leadership through nurture and care of the congregation. “Teachers” were those who expounded or applied the Scriptures to the congregation or gave an explanation or reiteration of apostolic injunctions. Because pastors and teachers are connected with the same article, the terms describe overlapping functions, “all pastors teach, but not all teachers are also pastors.”

166 4:12 is controversial grammatically. There have been two main approaches. The first approach sees πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων as dependant to the main verb, ἔδωκεν, and expresses the reason for why Christ gave the ministers. The next phrase, εἰς ἐργον διακονίας, because of the change in the prepositions, has been understood as subordinate to the first. The third phrase, εἰς οἰκοδομήν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, is seen as being dependent on the previous two phrases. On this view, Christ gave the ministers to equip the saints to do the work of service so that, by means of the work of both ministers and saints, the body would be built up. The second view sees all three phrases dependent on ἔδωκεν, so that the ministers equip the saints, do the work of service, and build up the body. They believe the change in preposition may be simply a stylistic variation (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 253-55,
believers, as equipped by their gifted ministers, exercise their gifts for the benefit of their fellow Christians, then the body of Christ is built up. What does this “building up” look like? The building up of the body of Christ is to continue until: (i) it comes to ἡν ἑνὸτητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (“the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God”); (ii) the body grows εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρόματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“into a mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’’); (iii) νήπιοι κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἁνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας ἐν τῇ κυβείᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐν πανουργίᾳ πρὸς τὴν μεθοδείαν τῆς πλάνης (“no longer be children tossed around by the waves and carried away by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning through deceitful schemes’’); and (iv) by ἀληθεύοντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ (“truthing in love”)¹⁶⁷, they grow up (αὐξάνω) in every way into the head of the body, Christ (4:13–14). The image is that of a child’s body maturing and growing up into a mature, adult body. This makes it clear that embodiment is something in which the church grows. As the body grows in unity and love, its ability to more fully embody Christ increases.¹⁶⁸ Paul, finally, describes the head and source of this growth when he says that from

Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 182-84, S. H. T. Page, “Whose Ministry? A Re-appraisal of Ephesians 4:12,” Novum Testamentum 47 (2005): 31-32). While this could be true, I agree with O’Brien [Ephesians, 302] however, that if Paul wanted to move from the work of ministers to the work of all God’s people, then the change in preposition confirms that movement and the mention of the “saints” underscores this. “If the three phrases described activities in which ministers alone were engaged, then one might have expected the term “saints” to appear at the point of change, namely, in 4:12c; instead, it occurs at the conclusion of the first phrase. C.f. Thielman, Ephesians, 277-80; Hoehner, Ephesians, 549.

¹⁶⁷ Most English translations render this phrase, “speaking the truth in love,” however a more literal rendering would be “truthing in love” as there is not verb, “to speak” in this phrase. Gombis [Drama, 16] notes that this indicates that truth is something that the church is to do, not just to know and to speak. God desires for truth to be done in community.

¹⁶⁸ James G. Samra, Being Conformed to Christ in Community: A Study of Maturity, Maturation and the Local Church in the Undisputed Pauline Epistles (Library of New Testament Studies 320; New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 108. He relates this to Paul’s language of being “transformed” “conformed” into Christ’s image (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29) Samra states, “To be conformed to the image of Christ is to become like Christ so that the character of Christ is manifested in the life of the believer.” Similarities with Stoic thought come through here. Troels Engberg-Pedersen [Paul and the Stoics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 38] states that the Stoics conceptualized a person’s movement from the I-state (being only concerned with fulfilling your desires as an individual) to the S-state (being concerned with fulfilling the desires of the group into which your individual has become a part) as a matter of
Christ, when each member of the body is working properly, it grows by building itself up in love (4:16). As Sang-Won Son states, “As the head, Christ not only is the ultimate standard of the growth of the church, but also joins and upholds the church and supplies all the needs for its growth.” In the rest of the letter, Paul will give specific ways that the church can grow in its embodiment of Christ.

An Overview of 4:17—6:18

Under the umbrella command to walk in a manner worthy of their calling of divine embodiment, Paul spends the rest of his letter giving specific exhortations directed to the individuals within the various Christian communities in Asia Minor. This section of the letter can be divided into 5 sections. First, in 4:17—5:2, Paul lays out how the church can be transformed continually more and more into the new humanity. This transformation takes place when Gentile believers forsake their former, immoral lives as unbelieving Gentiles and, instead, putting on the “new self” which is in the likeness of Christ. Second, in 5:3–21, Paul exhorts the believers to imitate God by walking in love, exposing evil deeds in their community, and living with discernment in these evil times. Third, in 5:22—6:9 (commonly referred to as the Haustafel), Paul lays out a manifesto for how the new humanity is to function as a political unit by giving a Christian view of household codes. Fourth, in 6:10–19, Paul encourages the church to act as the divine warrior on earth, victoriously engaging the evil powers fully equipped with God’s own armor. Fifth, in 6:20–23, Paul offers a final greeting in which he mentions that he is sending progression “from a childlike state to a mature state where the person is no longer a child but has reached perfection or again has left behind the kind of valuation that is natural to children in order to reach the grasp of the fully grown-up person.” With this concept, Paul seems to fundamentally agree.

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Tychichus as a messenger to them (presumably carrying the letter) to encourage them. He closes by blessing πάντων τῶν ἀγαπώντων τῶν κόρων ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ (“all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible”) with peace, love, and grace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I will now engage the commands given in each of the first four sections and show how the church’s calling to divine embodiment makes the best sense of them. But I will not treat the fifth section because it does not contain any commands.

The Old Nature/New Nature Dichotomy in 4:17–32

No Longer Live Like the Gentiles: 4:17

In 4:17, Paul goes back to talking in the first person singular, τοῦτο οὖν λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι ἐν κυρίῳ (“now this I say and testify in the Lord”). By using the phrase, ἐν κυρίῳ, Paul is referring to its use in 3:1 and 4:1 to remind his readers again of his apostolic authority. He charges them that they should no longer περιπατεῖν καθὼς καὶ τὰ ἐθνὴ περιπατεῖ ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοὸς αὐτῶν (“walk like the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds”) He sets up a contrast between the “walk” in this verse and the “walk” in 4:1. In essence, Paul is saying that walking in a manner worthy of their calling and walking in the manner of the sinful Gentiles surrounding them are mutually exclusive. In contrast to the believers being enlightened to comprehend God’s great blessings to his saints (1:18), the Gentiles are described in 4:18–19 as ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ (“darkened in their understanding”), ignorant (ἀγνοοῦν), hard-hearted (πῶρος τῆς καρδίας), calloused (ἀπηλγηκότες), given to sensuality (παρέδωκαν τῇ ἁσέλγειᾳ), and greedy for impurity (εἰς ἔργασιαν ἀκαθαρσίας πάσης ἐν πλεονεξίᾳ).  

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meaningless.”  Paul tells them that this is not the way that they ἔμαθεν τὸν Χριστὸν (“learned Christ”; 4:20). Philosophical writers of Paul’s time used the idea of “learning God” not merely to learn about him, but in a more relational sense of “renewing” one’s “kinship with him” (Chion of Heraclea, Epistles 16:8; Tatian, Orations on Grace 9.2). Thus, Paul is saying that the readers’ relationship with Christ is not based on acts of sin and immorality. Instead, the relationship is based on purity, love and truth (4:21). As Paul said in 1—3, the relationship of the church to Christ is body to head. If the body, as new creation, is to be the fullness of the head, on earth, then they cannot live as they did before they were re-created.


Connected with the previous command not to live like the Gentiles, Paul further states that the readers should put off their παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον (“old humanity”) that symbolized their former way of life and was φθειρόμενον κατὰ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ἀπάτης (“corrupted through deceitful lusts”; 4:22). Here, Paul is not saying that each individual has an “old person” inside of them which is to be replaced by her new character. Rather, it is the old, shared human nature in Adam that is to be laid aside in favor of the new human nature in Christ. Once they have put off this old nature, they are to be renewed (ἀνανεώσθαι) in the spirit of their minds (πνεῦμα τοῦ νοὸς; 4:23). This corresponds to Paul’s command in Romans to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (12:2). The “spirit,” in 4:23, refers to the human mind and not directly to God’s Spirit, but, as Fee states, God’s Spirit can be seen “hovering nearby.” He notes that the

171 Holloway, Peripateo, 204.

172 Muddimann, Ephesians, 217, notes that the infinitive ἀποθέσθαι should have imperatival force because the infinitive can be used in place of the imperative at times (c.f. Rom. 12:15, Phil. 3:16.)

173 Ibid., 219.
verb ἀνανεοσθαι is a passive, which means that another agent is acting on the believer. Since God works “through his spirit in the inner being” (3:16), then it is safe to say that it is the Spirit that renews the mind. 174 This, again, speaks to the nature of the church. It is a new creation. Just as the Spirit hovered “over the face of the waters” in the original creation (Gen. 1:2), so too the Spirit transforms the mind of this creation making it into something new.

Once they are renewed, they are to put on the καινὸν ἄνθρωπον τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ὁσιότητι τῆς ἁληθείας (“new humanity created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”; 4:24). 175 In a similar context in Romans, Paul gave a similar command to “put on the Lord Jesus” (Rom. 13:14). Since the church is to grow into the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13) and Christ is the fullness of God (1:23), then it seems that Paul is telling them to allow that for which he interceded in 3:17 to happen, that Christ, who is the template of the new humanity, would be formed in them. 176 This fits perfectly with the calling of divine embodiment. To embody the fullness of God in the world, the church must look continually to and model Jesus, who is himself the fullness of God (1:23) and represents the end goal of his body’s role in the world. This is why Paul is so adamant that his readers collectively put on the new humanity.

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175 Alstrup Nils Dahl, “Gentiles, Christians, and Israelites in the Epistle to the Ephesians,” Harvard Theological Review 79.1 (1996): 33, points out that these metaphors signal “a shift from the old to the new” and “a shift of identity as well as role.” Witherington III [Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 299] mentions that the virtues mentioned here are the same that Quintilian says are some of the major virtues to be praised in epideictic rhetoric (Institutes of Oratory 3.7.15).

176 Witherington III [Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 299] states, “Probably Paul has the Genesis creation story in mind here, and so the renewal of the image of God within the believer.”
Speak Truth: 4:25

In contrast to the deceitful desires of the old nature, Paul states, in 4:25, that the new humanity must put away falsehood (ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος). Instead, they are to speak the truth (λαλεῖτε ἁλήθειαν) with their neighbors.\(^{177}\) The reason he gives is that ὅτι ἐσμὲν ἄλληλων μέλη (“for we are members one with another”). It is often part of the human condition to try to get ahead of our fellow humans. We desire to be the most powerful person in our group. We want to control. It just so happens that, in Paul’s day, the evil powers had worked in such a way that deceit and backstabbing were effective means by which one could assume the most control over another human being. In fact, Satan is called the father of lies by Jesus (John 8:44). By using embodiment language, however, Paul emphasizes in this verse that there is no part of Christ’s body that is more important than the other. He has already emphasized that each part must work together and properly with the other parts for the church to arrive at its goal of full divine embodiment (4:16). This will never happen, however, if members of the body are trying to gain power through deceit. Rather, the readers must confound the powers by “truthing in love” (4:15) and operating in unity without any power-grabbing. In this way, they are embodying their Lord who was, himself, the very embodiment of truth (John 14:6) and whose words are always true (John 17:17).

Do not Sin in Your Anger: 4:26

The next command that Paul gives is to ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε (“be angry but do not sin”; 4:26). There is such a thing as righteous anger. Jesus exhibited this when he drove out the money-changers in the temple (Matt. 21:12). It can also be seen in Paul’s zealous rebuke of

\(^{177}\) Moritz [Old Testament, 88-89] notes that this is almost an exact quote from Zechariah 8:16 in the LXX, λαλεῖτε ἁλήθειαν ἐκκατοὺς πρὸς τὸν πλῆθον αὐτοῦ. In so doing, Paul demonstrates his awareness of OT ethics. Possibly, any Jewish readers would have picked up on this, however, the Gentiles may not have.
the Judaizers in Galatians 5:12, “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!” But Paul acknowledges in Ephesians 4:26 that when anger is present, the temptation to act sinfully is also present. So, he is giving them a practical step to avoid sinning when he states ὁ ἥλιος μὴ ἑπιδύσῃ ἐπὶ τῷ παροργισμῷ ὑμῶν (“do not allow the sun to go down on your anger”). He wants them to refuse to let their anger fester. The Hebrew prophet Micah stated, “alas for those who devise wickedness and evil deeds on their beds! When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in their power” (2:1 LXX). Even Plutarch acknowledged that if anger goes long unattended, it increases and can form into sinister plots of revenge (Moralia 488). This is not something that should happen to believers in Christ. The main goal that Paul gives is for them not to δίδοτε τῷ διαβόλῳ (“give opportunity to the devil”) Paul is referring back to 2:1–2 in which he said that, as unbelievers, the readers used to walk according to the way of life prescribed by the evil powers under the control of the devil himself. If they let their anger get the best of them, then they are choosing to embody, once again, the evil powers in their lives. Instead, they are supposed to embody God, who is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psa. 103:8 ESV), so they must refrain from doing things the devil’s way.

Do not Steal: 4:28

The next exhortation is for former thieves to cease stealing (4:28). Ancient Greeks and Romans commonly assumed that stealing was wrong (e.g., Plato, Republic 1.344; Epictetus, Dissertations 1.9.15, 17) and the exhortation not to steal features prominently in OT and Jewish

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178 C.f. the Dead Sea Scrolls who were not allowed to anger from one day to the next for this reason. (CD 7:2–3)

179 Thielman [Ephesians, 314] notes that Paul expresses no interest in the philosophical debate going on at that time over whether all anger is harmful and should be eliminated or some anger is justified and people should seek to channel it in useful directions. For Paul, he views anger simply as an emotion that can quickly become sinful.
literature (Exod. 20:15; Deut. 5:19; Jer. 7:9; *Pseudo-Phocylides*. 6.18; Philo, *Special Laws* 4.1–40). According to Thielman, “Paul probably has in mind, then, the working poor whose income would fluctuate with the seasons in the agrarian economy of Roman Asia and who may have supplemented their income in difficult times by secretly stealing from their employers and others.”¹⁸⁰ Instead they are to work with their hands so that they ἔχωμεντι ἔχοντας ἔχοντας (“may be able to give to those in need”). This is truly an embodiment of Christ. Jesus stated that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John. 10:10–11). Here, Jesus contrasts himself with the thief and instead, characterizes himself as one who gives the most necessary gift for those who were helpless.¹⁸¹ Ephesians has been full of gifts: God gave believers new life in Christ and has blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (1:3); Christ gave gifts to the church for the building up of his body (4:8). So too, if the church is to embody God, then they must be willing to give. Where the evil powers say take whatever you can. The church must embody Christ to the world, who gave himself up for her.

Let no Evil Come out of Your Mouth: 4:29

Next, Paul tells the readers πᾶς λόγος σαπρὸς ἐκ τοῦ στόματος υμῶν μὴ ἐκπορευέσθω (“let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths”). The “corrupting talk” probably includes both the deceptive speech in 4:14 and sexually crude or foolish speech of 5:4. If they do this, Paul states that they would be grieving (λυπέω) the Holy Spirit, ἐν ο鬲 ἐσφραγίσθητε εἰς ἡμέραν ἀπολυτρώσεως (“by whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption”; 4:30). Here Paul is


¹⁸¹ Notice, again, that Jesus is pictured as the model patron in this text.
echoing Isaiah 63:10, “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit” (ESV), to emphasize that the Spirit whom they are grieving is the Spirit of God himself.182 If believers’ words serve to tear down and divide the body, this hinders the body from becoming what it is meant to be through the Spirit: the fullness of God. This makes the Spirit, whom they share, sad and further fragments the body.183 This undermines embodiment because a fragmented body cannot do anything, much less embody the fullness of God on earth. Instead, their speech should only serve to build up the body of Christ so that it will δῶ χάριν τοῖς ἀκούοντις (“give grace to those who hear”). This is quite a remarkable statement on the power of words. What Paul is saying here is that the church can attain to her eschatological hope of fully embodying Christ by speaking graciously and encouragingly to one another as needed. Rudolf Schnackenburg points out that this runs parallel with Paul’s command to give to the needy in 4:28, “As Christians should give away some of their earthly possessions to the needy, so they should bestow ‘grace’ on the listeners, give a spiritual gift, with every good word spoken.”184 If they do this, then they are embodying Christ’s actions in his incarnation in which his words gave encouragement to and built up those to whom he spoke (e.g. John 14:1–6).

Dispel Malice: 4:31–32

Paul moves from corrupting language to malicious language when he tells the readers to πᾶσα πικρία καὶ θυμὸς καὶ ὀργή καὶ κραυγή καὶ βλασφημία ἀρθήτω ἀφ’ ὑμῶν (“let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander be dispelled from among you”; 4:31). Thielman argues that all

182 Moritz, Old Testament, 92.

183 Fee, Empowering, 715. He also notes that the Spirit is literally the fullness of the presence of God in believers. If they reject the Spirit, they have rejected their calling.

184 Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 209.
five of these vices can refer to “angry verbal abuse,” and since the immediate context concerns language, Paul probably has angrily expressed words in mind. These are to be removed, σὸν πάσῃ κακίᾳ (“together with all malice”). According to F. Danker et al., κακίᾳ refers to “a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition.” So they must also remove the attitude causing the angry speech, not only the outward symptoms. The phrase, ἄρθητο is in the aorist tense, which sets it apart from the ten previous, present tense verbs. This underlines the contrast between the reader’s former conduct as Gentile unbelievers and what their conduct now as believers should be. They should replace this malicious attitude with being εἰς ἀλλήλους χρηστοὶ εὐσπλαγχνοι χαριζόμενοι ἑαυτοῖς (“kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other”; 4:32). The motivation behind these new attitudes is the action of God toward the community. They are to forgive each other, καθὼς καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἐν Χριστῷ ἔχαρίσατο ὑμῖν (“just as God in Christ forgave you”). God has forgiven the church through the blood of Christ (1:7). The church now is to embody God’s forgiving nature in the world. The evil powers have made the attitude of revenge and grudges the standard. The church confounds the powers, however, when each member of the body sacrifices its own justice and puts itself in a position of weakness for the sake of the other.

Imitate God: 5:1–2

The exhortation to forgive as God has forgiven, moves seamlessly into the conclusion of this section (set off by οὖν) which sums up what he has been saying. They are told to γίνεσθε μιμηταὶ τοῦ θεοῦ (“be imitators of God”; 5:1). Because Paul sees the church as the new

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185 Thielman, Ephesians, 319.

186 Danker et al., BDAG, 500.

187 Hoehner, Ephesians, 636.

188 Gerald F. Downing [Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches (New York, Routledge, 1988), 206] points out that imitating the gods was a common motif in Cynic literature. The gods, for the Cynic provide the model for
humanity created in the image of Christ, he thinks that she should be the embodiment of God in
the world. In his other letters, Paul has instructed the churches to “imitate me as I imitate Christ”
(1 Cor. 11:1; c.f. 4:16) and to imitate other godly colleagues (2 Thess. 3:7, 9). Here, he goes the
next step further, taking out the middle man as it were, and tells them to imitate Christ’s love.
Christ is the one who loved both Jew and Gentile unbelievers and gave himself up for them
(5:2).\(^{189}\) They are supposed to do this ὡς τέκνα ἁγαπητά (“as beloved children”), which reminds
the readers that they are part of God’s family. As Leon Morris states,

> In any family, it is right that children should look up to and respect their father,
but this is especially important in the heavenly family. We become members of
this family only because the heavenly Father in his great love sent his only Son to
die on a cross for us and thus bring us to salvation. With love like that as the basis
of our membership, it is incumbent on us that we imitate God and live as loving
people.\(^ {190}\)

The church is called to embody Christ’s sacrificial spirit in the world. If they do this, Paul states
that they will be προσφορὰν καὶ θυσίαν τῷ θεῷ εἰς ὅσμην εὕωδίας (“a fragrant offering and
sacrifice to God”). In the OT, there were certain sacrifices given at the temple that were said to
be particularly pleasing to God (e.g. Exod. 29:18; Lev 2:9; Ezek. 20:41). Thus, the writer
indicates that Christ’s sacrifice was one of those sacrifices. Paul is saying that if his readers love
as Christ loved, then their sacrifice will embody Christ’s sacrifice to the world and be a fragrant

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\(^{189}\) Te-Li Lau [The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books (Novum Testamentum Supplement Series 133; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 119] claims here that Ephesians “conflates the call to
imitate God with the call to imitate the cruciform pattern of Christ, whose “peacemaking act” on the cross becomes
the prototype of human behavior.

\(^{190}\) Morris, Ephesians, 153.
offering to God as well. This, of course, echoes the temple imagery assigned to the church in chapters 1—3. The body of Christ is the new temple, filled with the Spirit, who, contra the OT, does not offer animal sacrifices on her altars. Instead, she offers herself to God through her holy actions, which are pleasing to him (c.f. Rom. 12:1–2).

The Light/Darkness Dichotomy in 5:3–21

No Impurity among You: 5:3–4

In this section of exhortations, Paul moves from talking about the contrast between the old nature, which imitates the world, with the new nature, which imitates God, to the contrast between living in the dark and living in the light. Paul begins by stating that they should not allow πορνεία (“fornication”), ἀκαθαρσία (“impurity”), πλεονεξία (“greed”), αἰσχρότης (“filthiness”), μορφολογία (“foolish speech”), or εὐτραπελία (“course jesting”) among them (5:3–4). These vices, all relating to sexual immorality or lust, were common in the religious cults in Asia minor. For example, in Hieropolis, those in the Demeter cult were known to indulge in coarse language to amuse the gods (Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 5.4.7). Paul is saying that this type of speech does not amuse the true God. Not only should these behaviors not be in their midst, it should not even be ὀνομαζέσθω ἐν ὑμῖν (“named among you”). What this means is

191 Lincoln, Ephesians, 312. Similarly, Paul in Philippians 4:18 speaks of the Philippians’ sacrificial love for him in the same terms that he uses it in Ephesians.

192 James W. Thompson [Moral Formation According to Paul (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 88-90] notes that vice lists such as this one are rarely found in the OT, but are a common feature in Greco-Roman ethical instruction. The most prominent list in antiquity was the catalog of virtues attributed to Plato (Phaedrus 69c) in which he lists wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice. Greeks also named four cardinal vices: folly, intemperance, injustice, and cowardice (Stobaeus, Extracts 2.59). Hellenistic Judaism appropriated, adapted, and sometimes expanded these lists in their ethical instructions (e.g. Philo, Allegorical Interpretation 1.63; Wis. Sol. 14:23).

that no one should even be suspicious or tempted to accuse anyone in the believing community of impurity. What should characterize them, instead, is thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία). This removal of impurity is καθώς πρέπει ἁγίος ("as is proper among the saints"). Not only do actions like these go against the new nature of the church, but as God’s holy ones, tasked with divine embodiment, they would be hypocritical if they practiced unholy practices. If the new humanity began living out the actions of their old nature, then they would be misrepresenting their holy God and would forfeit their inclusion in the body of Christ. Paul reinforces this thought when he states that no one who practices impurity, greediness, which he identifies as idolatry, has an inheritance in τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ ("the kingdom of Christ and God"; 5:5).

This last statement is so important for Paul, that he tells them not to let anyone deceive (ἀπατάω) them with κενοῖς λόγοις ("empty words") into thinking that practicing these sins is permitted because God’s wrath (ὀργή) comes upon those who are disobedient (ἀπείθεια; 5:6). Because the readers are not destined for wrath, but are sealed for a glorious inheritance, they are not even to associate with the disobedient (5:7). This is based on a change in their very nature, and in language reminiscing chapter 2, Paul reminds them of this when he states that ἦτε ποτε σκότος νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ ("once you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord"; 5:8). Because their nature has been changed to that of “light”, they are to ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατέτε ("walk as children of light") by practicing things that are ἀγαθοσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀληθεία ("good and right and true"). In fact, the only association with the deeds of darkness that Paul

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194 Williamson [Ephesians, 139] notes that “People whose conversation revolves around sex reveal an emptiness that they are seeking to fill. People whose conversation is full of thanksgiving show that God has already filled their hearts.”

195 Lincoln, Ephesians, 325. Notice that, through the use of ἀπείθεια, Paul identifies the practitioners of these acts as equal to the “sons of disobedience” in 2:2 who were destined for wrath because of their sinfulness.
mentions is the church’s exposing (ἐλέγχω) of them (5:11). They accomplish this by simply practicing the deeds of the light Paul has already mentioned. When they do this, the darkness around them is exposed, τά δὲ πάντα ἔλεγχομενα ύπὸ τοῦ φωτὸς φανεροῦται (“for when anything is exposed to light it becomes visible”; 5:13).196 Paul then, in verse 14, cites a “carefully crafted piece of early Jewish-Christian liturgy that was probably widely used in the first century,” to describe Christian conversion: πάν γὰρ τὸ φανεροῦμενον φῶς ἐστιν διὸ λέγει ἐγειρέ τὸ καθεύδων καὶ ἀνάστα ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ἐπιφανεῖσθαι σοι ὁ Χριστός (“for this reason it says, ‘Awake sleeper! Rise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.’”).197 In chapter 2:1, Paul stated that before conversion, the Gentiles were dead, they were “asleep.” But now that they have been raised to life and put into the body of Christ, they are to radiate the light, the works of Christ, to the culture in which they are living. This was not only for the new convert, however as Peter Williamson states, “For the Christian who has fallen into serious wrongdoing, these words are an invitation to repent and receive Christ’s grace again.”198

Understand What the Will of the Lord is: 5:10, 17

Paul then, begins a new exhortation, βλέπετε οὖν ἀκριβῶς πῶς περιπατεῖτε μὴ ὡς ἄσοφοι ἀλλ’ ὡς σοφοὶ ἐξαγοραζόμενοι τὸν καιρὸν ὅτι αἱ ἡμέραι πονηραὶ εἰσιν (“look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time for the days are evil”; 5:15–16). The οὖν links the instruction in a general way with the previous overall exhortation to walk as

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196 This is not to say that wrongdoing, especially in the church, should not be confronted. Chrysostom in commenting on this passage stated that there was no better evidence of friendship than for someone to tell another that he/she is wrong and urges his congregants to reprove each other in love (Homilies on Ephesians 18). I believe that this passage is speaking of the church’s exposing the world’s darkness, not fellow believers’, but Chrysostom’s argument could be taken to be a good application of this passage. If we are to expose the culture’s darkness, how much more should we expose darkness in the church.

197 Thielman, Ephesians, 350.

198 Williamson, Ephesians, 147.
children of light. Believers’ lives are to be characterized by two things. First, they are to be careful that they walk wisely. Wisdom refers, not only to knowledge, but to have a skill in living. Second, they are to walk redeeming the time in these evil days. What Paul is calling them to do is to live in a way that enacts God’s “redemptive dynamics” in their precise situations and in new situations that arise in the future. This goes along, precisely, with the purpose Paul ascribes to the church in 3:10. They are to embody God’s “multi-faceted” wisdom in the world. To do this, however, the body must have a sound mind that is saturated with God’s wisdom. But how do they have this? He tells them to δοκιμάζοντες τι ἐστιν εὐάρεστον τῷ κυρίῳ (“attempt to discern what is pleasing to the Lord”; 5:10) and συνίετε τι τὸ θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου (“understand what the will of the Lord is” 5:17). They are to use the Spirit of wisdom that they have been given (1:17) to discern how to act in the fear of the Lord in different ethical situations. As Lincoln says, “For believers, wise living involves a practical perception dependent on the direction of their Lord.”

If they are to embody God in the world, they cannot do this without discerning the will of God; for, if they act in the ways that seem right to them, they will be guilty of the same sin that Israel committed in the time of the judges: rejecting God’s rulership, “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25).

Be Filled by the Spirit: 5:18–21

Paul’s next admonition is μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἶνῳ ἐν ὑ ἐστιν ἁσωτία ἄλλα πληρῶσθε ἐν πνεύματι (“do not become drunk with wine but be filled by the Spirit”; 5:18). Normally this passage is interpreted through the lens of individualism. You as a person must not be over-filled
with wine and allow alcohol to control your mood and actions. Instead, you are to be filled with the Spirit so that the Spirit controls your mood and actions. While this would have been a good admonition, this is not what Paul is talking about. Instead, Paul is contrasting two communities. They are not to act like the communities in Asia Minor getting drunk and behaving in an ungodly manner corresponding to the standard of the evil powers. Instead, they are to be filled with the presence of God through the Spirit. If the church is the body of Christ, there must be an animating agent within the body (c.f. Jas. 2:26). The church is the fullness of Christ because the Spirit indwells her and builds her up. She is the physical presence of the fullness of God on earth by the Spirit. She manifests this by her godly habits and practices.

In verse 19, Paul lists some practices by which the community can tell if it is being filled by the Spirit: worshipping, giving thanks, and mutual submission. First, a Spirit-filled community must engage in singing ψαλμοίς καὶ ὑμνοῖς καὶ ὑδάες πνευματικαὶς ἄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες τῇ καρδιᾷ ὑμῶν τῷ κυρίῳ (“addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs while singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart”; 5:19). Interestingly,

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202 According to Lloyd K. Pieterse [“Wine, Debauchery, and the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18–19),” in Conception, Reception, and the Spirit: Essays in Honour of Andrew T. Lincoln (J. Gordon McConville and Lloyd K. Pieterse eds.; Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2015), 133], Paul’s readers would have known the symbolism of wine and its association with merriment and the good life. The classic literature, however, is replete with warnings that excess drinking of wine leads to debauchery. For Paul, then, “wine, because of its inherent ambiguity, can no longer function as a symbol of the good life in Christ. Instead, the symbol of the good life is the Spirit, with whom there can be no excess.”

203 John Paul Heil [“Ephesians 5:18b: ‘But Be Filled in the Spirit,’” Catholic Biblical Quarterly 69 (2007): 516] argues that ἐν πνεύματι should be taken as a dative of sphere. He argues that the exalted Christ fills the believers with “gifts of love” in the realm of the Spirit. I submit that this so-called realm of the spirit is too ambiguous to make any sense here. In context, I believe that ἐν πνεύματι should be translated as “by the Spirit.” Earlier, Paul said that the church was the dwelling place of God “by the Spirit” (2:22). Paul has also prayed that they would be “filled with all the fullness of God” (3:19). Thus, in this command, Paul directs his readers to be filled by the Spirit with the fullness of God in Christ, “he is commanding them to participate in this accomplished reality and to work towards its realization in greater effectiveness and fruitfulness. In other words, Paul is commanding his readers to be the temple of God, or, to be the dwelling place of God by the Spirit” [Timothy G. Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in its Epistolary Setting,” Tyndale Bulletin 53.2 (2002): 267-68].

204 Gombis, Drama, 175.
Christians are to address these songs to each other and not to God alone. This makes it clear that worship is not just a matter of adoration but also involves edification. Second, the community is to be characterized by εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἰμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρί (“always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”; 5:20). Paul has laid out what God has done for his readers in Christ. The church should be forever grateful for this and show it by the public giving of thanks even through suffering. Third, and finally, they are to ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις ἐν φόβῳ Χριστοῦ (“submit to one another in the fear of Christ”; 5:21). The community must be ordered in a Christ-like way. The best way of understanding this is a directive toward those in the community who were in positions of authority to make sure that they also submit to their subordinates. For example, Paul, by his apostleship, is an authority over his readers, yet he speaks of himself as a slave (1 Cor. 9:19). Likewise, he tells the Galatians that they should “serve as each other’s slave through love” (Gal. 5:13). Thus, by subordinating to all believers, even those in subordinate positions, the readers can embody God who served humanity (who were his enemies, not simply subordinates) by sending his only son to bring them back to life (Eph. 2:1–10).

**The Household Code: 5:22—6:9**

After discussing what the new humanity filled by the Spirit ought to look like, ending with an exhortation to the mutual submission of the members of the community, Paul then begins to describe what relationships ought to look like within this new humanity. 5:22–6:9 is commonly referred to as the *haustafel* and has often been treated simply as a resource in the

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206 Thielman, *Ephesians*, 373-74. This is not to say that it is also not directed toward those who are in the subordinate position. They should still obey as well. This is especially emphasized in the next section 5:22—6:9. But in this verse, the mutuality of the command is emphasized.
debate over the place of women in ministry and in the home. Per Gombis, most scholars regard the *haustafel* to have an apologetic thrust in Ephesians, “viewing it as an attempt to shield the new Christian movement from the suspicion that it might undermine contemporary social structures and ultimately threaten the stability of the Romans Empire.”

Gombis argues against this by saying that there is little evidence within the passage that there is an apologetic thrust at all. Paul does not seem to be trying to justify Christianity against the suspicion of Rome. In fact, Paul is trying to stress the difference between the Christian community and the outside culture by “painting in broad strokes a vision for how believers ought to conduct themselves in new creation communities.” In order to do this, Paul speaks of relationship within the Christian household as the most intimate places of conduct within the communities. A more satisfying reading of the *haustafel* regards it as “aimed at counteracting the devastating effects of the powers upon human relationships,” which Gombis takes to be “perversion of relationships by selfishness and greed, leading to domination and rebellion.” Paul seeks to transform “relationships within appropriate hierarchical structures,” not by overthrowing such structures, but rather by subjecting them to “new creation dynamics” so that relationships within the new humanity take on a renewed, ordered character.

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208 He states that after the critique of pagan culture in 5:1–21 it would be odd for Paul to try to find common ground with pagans [“New Humanity,” 318-19].

209 Political philosophers also used to address the proper ordering of the *politeia* as a whole. They wrote about the ordering of the household because it was best to begin with a society’s smallest parts and work upward (e.g. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253b; *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1160b–1161a; Areius Didymus *Epitome* 2.147–48).

Wives and Husbands: 5:22–33

The first admonition in the household code is for wives to be subject (ὑποτάσσω) to their own (ἰδιος,) husbands ὡς τῷ κυρίῳ (“as to the Lord”; 5:22).²¹¹ Through the use of ἱδιος, Paul is limiting the commands to the marriage relationship. Women do not have to submit to every man. The phrase, “as to the Lord,” means that their submission to their husbands is part of their commitment to the Lord, it is not the result of some innate authority in the male head of the household.²¹² Paul goes back to his statements in chapter 1 about Christ and the church to give an analogical backing to this admonition. He states that the husband is the head (κεφαλή) of the wife in the same way Christ is the head (κεφαλή) of the church (1:22) and that the wife should submit to the husband in the same way the church submits to Christ (5:23). Many proponents of gender egalitarianism in ministry interpret κεφαλή as “source” rather than “authority.” They state that Paul is saying that the husband is the source of the wife (an allusion to the creation of Eve from Adam’s side in Genesis 2) as Christ is the source of the church being the agent of the creation of the new humanity.²¹³ In contrast, Wayne Grudem, states, “A word’s meaning is found by examining its use in various contexts. Κεφαλή is found in over fifty contexts where it refers to people who have authority over others of whom they are the “head.” But it never once takes a meaning “source without authority,” as egalitarians would like to make it mean.”²¹⁴ Interpreting

²¹¹ The verb ὑποτάσσω does not appear in this verse, it must be mentally supplied to make sense of the statement. Thielman, Ephesians, 375, notes that the absence of the verb “tightens the connection between 5:21 and 5:22 and shows that Paul is describing here in 5:22 how wives can live out the instructions on submission that in 5:21 he gave to everyone.”


²¹³ Philip B. Payne, Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 286.

the noun as “source” also does not fit with the use of the word when used in relation to Christ in Ephesians. Paul has shown that Christ’s headship (κεφαλή) over all things, including and for the church, indicates his cosmic rule (1:20–23). This use definitely denotes rulership. Wives, then, should submit “in everything” as the church submits to the rule of Christ (5:24). The phrase “in everything” refers to the complete obedience, but either the analogy to Christ has qualified this or Paul assumes that his readers would use common sense and not disobey God in obedience to their husbands.

The authority of the husbands is further qualified when Paul states that they should exercise their authority in love (ἀγαπάω) of their wives (5:25). The love is analogous to Christ’s love for the church in his giving himself up for her and watching over her cleansing (5:26–27). It is here that Paul breaks the cultural boundaries in Greco-Roman marriage. In Roman society, according to Susan Treggiari, the father was “theoretically monarch within his own house” and everything should be done by his family to enhance his social prestige. In modeling Christ, Paul believes that the husband’s love includes the sacrifice of his own social prestige, well-being,

215 What is amazing is that Christ’s rulership is characterized by the giving of salvation to the church, showing its self-sacrificial nature. According to Gombis (“New Humanity,” 326), “This is the kind of headship Paul has in mind, so that those in subordinate positions in the New Humanity do not exist for the comfort of those at the top. Rather, those who have authority or power are to use it for the good protection and nurture of those subordinate to them.”

216 Thielman, Ephesians, 380.

217 Arnold [Ephesians, 35] notes that Paul’s concept of marital love also breaks the mold of Jewish conceptions of marriage, which had a demeaning attitude toward the wife. For example, Josephus claimed that women were inferior to their husbands in all things (Against Apion 2.25 c.f. Philo, Hypothetica 7.3). The absence of the self-sacrificial aspect of love in Greco-Roman culture illustrated by Plutarch’s description of the attitude of Aemilius Paulus toward his wife. Plutarch states that while Papiria was a perfect wife, Aemilius decided to divorce because the shoe she made for him pinched his foot. (Aemilius Paullus, 5)

218 Susan Treggiari, “Marriage and Family in Roman Society” in Marriage and Family in the Biblical World (Ken M. Campbell ed.; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2003), 145. For example, Cicero’s Scipio puts it to Laelius “Isn’t it true that no one but you rules your entire house?” (De officiis 1.54). She states that the father had such power over his children that he could put them to death at wish. The Father could scourge, shame, punish, or sell him as well. In fact, it was said that the father had more power of his son than a master over his slaves (Dionysius Halicarnassensis, Antiquites of Rome. 2.26.3).
and his very life, for the sake of his wife.  Paul, then, uses another analogy: that husbands should love their own wives ὡς τὰ ἐαυτῶν σώματα (“as their own bodies”; 5:28). The idea is that when a man takes care of his own body, he nourishes and cherishes it, doing everything for its benefit, for in a healthy body the head cannot be against the body, nor the body against the head. Likewise, so should a man do for his wife. If a husband does this, he is embodying Christ who acts towards his church in the same way. Because μέλη ἐσμὲν τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ (“we are members of his body”), he nourishes and cherishes the believing community. In the same way, Christian husbands are to nourish and cherish their wives. Thus, husbands in the church can embody God by loving their wives in the way that Christ sacrificed himself for the church!

The quotation in 5:31, from Genesis 2:24 (“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”), is further affirmation of the unity of Christ and the church (e.g. we die, are buried, raised, and exalted with Christ), because Paul states that this μυστήριον μέγα (“great mystery”) is actually speaking of Christ and the church. If taken in this way, then marriage seems to have been instituted to prefigure Christ’s relationship with the Church. So, the “ground zero” of the church’s embodiment of God is found in the most intimate relationship within the community: its marriages!

219 Lincoln, Ephesians, 374. He states further, “The exhortation to sacrifice one’s own interests for the welfare of others, which is so necessary for the harmony of the community, now finds a more specific application in the husband’s role in contributing to marital harmony.”

220 Best, Ephesians, 548. He notes that there is parallel with Plutarch who says that a man ought to govern his wife as the soul does the body (Moralia 142E). Best notes that underlying this claim is a belief in a soul-body dualism and Plutarch speaks of governing and not loving his wife.

221 Jill Marshall [“Community Is a Body: Sex, Marriage, and Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 6:12-7:7 and Ephesians 5:21-33,” Journal of Biblical Literature 134.4 (2015): 841] notes, that although there is not physical sexual intercourse happening in this allusion, she does think that the union of Christ and the church produces children, “who are one new humanity.” But I think this is taking the metaphor too far. Is not the church the one new humanity? It seems better to me to take the allusion to simply be stressing the intimacy of the unity between Christ and the church.
Children and Fathers: 6:1–4

The next set of relationships is that of parents and children. Children are to obey (ὑπακούω) their parents ἐν κυρίῳ τούτῳ γάρ ἐστιν δίκαιον (“in the Lord for this is right”; 6:1). The basis for this command is the law of God and finds example in Jesus. The law stated that children were to honor their father and mother so that they would live long on the earth (Exod. 20:12). In keeping with this commandment, Jesus obeyed his Father in everything, so too, Christian children are to obey their parents. This small statement is incredible because Paul is saying that children, whose actions are often thought to be insignificant, can literally change the world through embodying Christ by obeying their parents.

The authority of Christian fathers (see note 218 above) is qualified when they are told not to παροργίζετε τὰ τέκνα ὑμῶν (“provoke your children to become angry”; 6:4). According to Philo, the father, not the mother, was responsible for discipline, which included scolding, rebuking, and beating if necessary (Special Laws 2.229-32). The injunction Paul makes in 6:4, then, tempers the severity of the discipline. The father is to ἐκτρέφετε αὐτὰ ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νουθεσίᾳ κυρίου (“bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”). According to Schnackenburg, the two concepts here, “discipline” and “instruction” have different emphases. The first term has more of the sense of a strict total education. The second term has more a verbal reprimanding, which would have been more appropriate for older children. But the

222 Moritz [Old Testament, 169] notes that in Exodus, the command was likely to older children who were to still listen and care for their parents. In Ephesians, however, the command was probably given to younger children. This is confirmed by 6:4 in which fathers are exhorted to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, thus implying the young age of the children. Hoehner [Ephesians, 786] points out, however, that they could not have been infants because they would have needed to be able to understand the concepts when the letter was read to the congregation.

223 Ibid., 786. He notes that even though the text just reads πατέρως, both parents are in view here.

224 Schnackenburg, Ephesians, 263.
father must do these things in kindness as he is teaching his children the things of Christ. The body of Christ does not comprise only a single generation. The next generation of the church must be prepared to embody God as well. Because of this, parents must pass on the law of God and the gospel of grace to their children and teach them what being filled with the Spirit looks like in their lives. This, in itself, is an embodiment of God who instructs his children in his ways with his eye upon them (Psa. 32:8).

Slaves and Masters: 6:5–9

The last set of social relationships Paul addresses is slaves and masters. Slaves are told to ὑπακούετε τοῖς κατὰ σάρκα κυρίοις (“obey your earthly masters”; 6:5). This is to be done in φόβου καὶ τρόμου ἐν ἀπλότητι τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν ὡς τῷ Χριστῷ (“fear and trembling in singleness of your heart as to Christ”). The word “singleness” refers to integrity and a sincere attitude. They are to obey as they would Christ, not trying to please humans by being seen by them but, rather, acknowledging that they are truly serving Christ ποιοῦντες τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκ ψυχῆς (“doing the will of God from the heart”; 6:6). The slave is to do this knowing that whatever good he does, he will be rewarded for it by his heavenly master, Christ (6:8).

Interestingly, in 6:9, masters are also told to render service to their slaves! One way they can

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225 Hoehner, Ephesians, 807.

226 Aristotle described slaves as humans, yet an offense to that humanity; therefore, a slave is simply property that belongs to another (Politics 1.5.3). Although he did not deny that the slave and master should seek the benefit of each other because they are bound by mutual interest, however, he concluded that there can be no true friendship between slaves because slaves were just “living tools” (Nicomachean Ethics 8.11.6). According to Simmons [Peoples, 313], this sentiment caused a troubling question for the Romans, “was a slave a person or a thing?” Even though Cicero seemed to develop a close bond with his slave-amanuensis and suffered anxiety over his health (Letters to Friends 16.1-22) and Pliny the Younger records that enormous gifts were willed to some slaves out of true love for them and their service (Épîles 6.3), on the majority, in the Roman Empire, slaves were not considered persons with rights but as objects over which their master had the right of disposal. For example, Seneca portrays a master who gorged himself at dinner while surrounded by his slaves who were not allowed to move their lips. If they coughed or sneezed or hiccupped, they would be hit with the lash (Moral Letters 47.2–3). Here, Paul is not advocating that slaves be released, but he is trying to make sure that masters realize that slaves are full brothers
do this is to stop threatening (ἀπειλή) their slaves. It is interesting that this command is not qualified in any way. The master is not supposed to give up only certain kinds of threatening, he must give it up entirely. Masters are to do this εἰδότες ὅτι καὶ αὐτῶν καὶ ὑμῶν ὁ κύριός ἐστιν ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ προσωπολημψία οὐκ ἐστιν παρ’ αὐτῶ (“knowing that both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no partiality with him”). God, their master, has saved them regardless of their Gentile ethnicity, so masters must embody God by rendering service and being kind to those who are subordinate to them, regardless of social status.

Embodying God as Warrior in 6:10–23

Be Strong in the Lord: 6:10

Paul begins the last section of the book with the words, τοῦ λοιποῦ (“from now on”; 6:10). This indicates, yet again, that Paul desires for his readers to move totally on from their past as evil Gentiles. Instead of supporting the evil powers, they are to actively resist them. The first step in this is for them to ἐνδυνάμωσθε ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἱσχύος αὐτοῦ (“be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his might”). Paul has already told them that the source of this strength comes from the Spirit (3:16) and that this strength is the ultimate power because it is the same power that God used when he raised Christ from the dead and...

227 Thielman, Ephesians, 410. He notes that this “cut the thread that held the institution [a master’s oppressive authority] together.”

228 In his discussion of God’s impartial nature within the master/slave context, he may be alluding to Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant, who was judged because he failed to show mercy to his subordinate after his king had just forgiven him a great debt (Matt. 18:21–35).

229 Ibid., 417

230 Muddiman [Ephesians, 286] states that it is best to understand ἐνδυνάμωσθε passively because it receives support from the following reference concerning the power of God.
seated him above all rule, power, and authority (1:20–23). Here, Paul is reminding them that this strength acts on their behalf. The point is that to embody God, the church cannot do it on her own strength, she must use the power of the one whom she is embodying.

Take up the Armor of God: 6:11–17

It is in this strength that the church is to put on τὴν πανοπλίαν τοῦ θεοῦ (“the whole armor of God”; 6:11). Paul is not speaking literally of physical armor because, for him, the church’s enemy is not physical. The church’s enemies with whom she “struggles” (πάλη)²³¹ are: τὰς μεθοδείας τοῦ διαβόλου (“the schemes of the devil”) and τὰς ἀρχὰς πρὸς τὰς έξουσίας πρὸς τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου πρὸς τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις (“rulers, authorities, cosmic powers of this present darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places”; 6:12).²³² Each of these refer to the evil powers over which God has triumphed in Christ. The church is called to realize this victory on earth through embodying the divine warrior. Believers are to stand, as a soldier ready for an attack, in the evil day, which day is now present but not yet in all its fullness.²³³ Paul identifies the armor that the church is to put on in verses 14–17. It includes: a belt of truth (ἀληθείᾳ), the breastplate of righteousness (τὸν θώρακα

²³¹ Plutarch argued for a relationship between a wrestler and one who fights in close-quarter military combat. In fact, he calls one Aeschylus a “weighty wrestler-in-armor” (Moralia 2.5.639). Based on this citation, M. E. Gudorf [“The Use of Πάλη in Ephesians 6:12,” Journal of Biblical Literature 117 (1998): 334] concludes that the term “struggle” (πάλη) carries a picture of an armored soldier, who is also an accomplished wrestler, engaging in fierce hand-to-hand combat. He states that Paul’s use of this imagery makes it so that the various aspects of standing, cunning, and danger, all crucial elements to his intended parenetic instruction are covered in a single stroke.

²³² Arnold [Powers, 150] notes that many of the Gentile believers in Asia Minor were formerly magical practitioners and worshippers of other gods. He argues that the pull to syncretize their Christianity with other practices and beliefs would have been intense. These new believers needed to know how to respond to the gods and goddesses they formerly worshipped. Paul is telling them to stand against them.

²³³ Barth, Ephesians 4–6, 804-05; Lincoln, Ephesians, 446. C.f John P. Dickson, Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2.159; Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 117.
τῆς δικαιοσύνης), the shoes of the proclamation of the gospel of peace (ἐτοιμασία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς εἰρήνης), the shield of faith (τὸν θυρεὸν τῆς πίστεως), the helmet of salvation (τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου), and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεῦματος ὁ ἐστιν ρῆμα θεοῦ).

The list of armor is an allusion to Isaiah 59:14–21 in which God puts on the armor (“he put on righteousness as a coat of mail and salvation as a helmet on his head”) to enact vengeance against the rebellious in Israel. According to J. Alec Motyer, in Isaiah, clothing, such as God’s armor, “is always a metaphor for character.” Thus, if Paul is alluding to this scripture in 6:14–17, then the church’s armor consists literally of the character traits of God. This means that there is an embodiment theme in these verses: against the schemes of the devil, the church battles by embodying the divine attributes! Gombis has good insights here:

The church, then, is the place where the world encounters Jesus Christ and the agency through which Jesus Christ blesses the world with his love and grace. And just as Jesus was subject to the assaults of the powers during his time here on earth, the church now battles against the powers and authorities arrayed against God’s purposes in the world. In this rhetorical conclusion to his letter, then, Paul exhorts the church to do just as God has done in his previous appearances as the divine warrior…Paul casts the church as the presence of God on earth and as the chief character in God’s ongoing cosmic conflict with the suprahuman powers that rule the present evil age. God has delivered the death blow to them in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there is an ongoing battle. Jesus Christ continues to wage this warfare, and he does so through the church.

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234 Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld [Put on the Armour of God: The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 131] correctly points out that the armor here is not being compared to a Roman legionnaire, as is often the case in modern exposition; instead, it is being compared to that of the divine warrior in Isaiah 59, “the force of the image in Ephesians derives from the recognition that the armour is God’s.”


236 Gombis, Drama, 157-58.
If the church continues to embody the divine warrior, there efforts will ultimately result in final victory, according to God’s plan and to his glory.\textsuperscript{237}

Pray in the Spirit: 6:18

Although he drops the military imagery in 6:18, in this verse, Paul perhaps describes the Christian’s greatest weapon against the schemes of the devil: prayer.\textsuperscript{238} James Rosscup notes that Paul has been modeling this style of warfare by praying for them earlier in the letter (1:15–23; 3:14–21).\textsuperscript{239} Allow me to make four observations concerning this exhortation. Paul tells them first, to προσευχόμενοι ἐν πάντι καιρῷ (“pray at all times”), indicating that prayer should be the constant activity of church. Second, he tells them to pray ἐν πνεύματι (“in the Spirit”). This phrase does not refer simply to the ambiguous idea of a “sphere of the Spirit.” Elsewhere, where Paul talks about the relationship of the Spirit to prayer, Paul refers to prayer that the Spirit empowers (Rom. 8:26). So, instead of merely a “sphere”, the use of the phrase here refers to prayer that the Spirit gives the believer the strength and words to utter.\textsuperscript{240} Third, they are to ἀγρυπνοῦντες ἐν πάσῃ προσκαρτερήσει καὶ δεήσει περὶ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων (“be on the alert with

\textsuperscript{237} Yoder Neufeld [Armour, 125] points out that “by placing the community into the armour of God,” Paul has the church “in imitation directly of God…and places the church into direct confrontation with the powers, and thus also into the eschatological location of the final battle.”

\textsuperscript{238} Bruce [Ephesians, 411] notes that the participle προσευχόμενοι could be functioning imperitivally here or as just the last participle in a series of participles connected to the verb “stand” (6:14). Either way, I believe that the main point of the passage is that prayer is the most important way we can stand against the devil.


\textsuperscript{240} Bruce, Ephesians, 411. It must be said, along with Fee [Empowering, 731], that Paul intends this phrase precisely as he has used it elsewhere—especially in 1 Cor 14:14 – 15 and Rom. 8:26 – 27—to refer specifically to that form of prayer in which the Spirit assumes a special role in the praying, especially, though probably not exclusively, praying in tongues.” In such a way, praying in tongues can be a form of spiritual warfare. While I agree with Fee that this is an option, I think that it is weakened by Paul giving the believers the content that he wants prayed (6:19). This does not preclude, however, that Paul has tongues in mind here. It may be that Paul views “praying in the Spirit” as comprising both understood prayers and glossolalia.
all perseverance and in petition for all the saints”). The phrase, “alert,” meant to “lie awake, pass sleepless nights,” and was used in eschatological contexts in early Christianity of the need for believers to “stay awake” as they awaited the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:33).\(^{241}\) Paul is telling them that there is no time to entertain the deeds of darkness; instead, they must focus their time and concentration on embodying God through Spirit-given prayer, while awaiting Christ’s return. By doing this, they are also embodying the actions of Jesus who relied on constant prayer to accomplish his earthly ministry (Luke 5:16). Fourth, they are to pray for πάντων τῶν ἁγίων (“all the saints”). It is easy for believers to become focused on themselves in prayer; instead, they are to pray for all believers with whom they are united in this spiritual battle. Specifically, Paul asks them to pray for boldness in his proclamation of the mystery of the gospel, of which he is πρεσβευόν ἐν ἁλυσει (“an ambassador in chains”; 6:19–20). As he embodies God through his apostolic ministry, Paul’s final imperative is asking them to pray that he would not shrink back from the responsibility God has given him, but accomplish it with boldness!

**Theological Conclusion: Being and Doing in Paul**

I believe that I have successfully shown how each of the imperatives have their foundation in Paul’s idea in chapters 1—3 that the church’s role in God’s cosmic plan, her calling, is to embody God’s character and attributes to a world that desperately needs it. I further submit that this idea is consistent with Paul’s view on the relationship between being and doing. For Paul, who you are determines what you do: being determines doing; theology determines ethics. This point is made especially clear in texts such as Galatians 5:16–26 and Romans 8:1–11 in which those who have been indwelt by the Spirit produce works that are in keeping with the character of the Spirit and those who are still in the flesh produce works that are in keeping with

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\(^{241}\) Thielman, *Ephesians*, 433.
the sinful nature. According to Ben Witherington III, the reason why theology and ethics are so intertwined in Paul’s thought is because salvation involves both, not just one or the other. Paul’s challenge in his letters, then, is to “help his audience integrate belief and behavior, showing how certain kinds of behaviors are inconsistent both with certain beliefs and with what the Spirit is doing in the life of a person or a community.”242 In 1—3, Paul has painted an incredible picture of the new humanity God has created in Christ and how this new humanity, the body of Christ, has a role to play in the inauguration of God’s kingdom and new creation: divine embodiment. So, in 4—6, Paul has given his readers specific ways in which they can embody God, i.e. live out their being, in their communities.

242 Witherington III, Theology and Ethics, 244. C.f. Schreiner, Apostle, 254-55. He believes that ethical exhortations are necessary in the interval between the “already” and the “not yet.” The church has a role to fulfill because full consummation of salvation is not yet complete.
Conclusion

To sum up, in this study I have attempted to show how the calling of the church, which Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:1, ties together the “theological” and “ethical” portions of the letter. Through an exegesis and theological analysis of Ephesians 1—3, it was concluded that Paul identifies the church primarily as a new creation of God, the body of Christ. This body, through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, functions as the new dwelling place of God’s presence that has been tasked with displaying God’s wisdom, character, and morality in the world (3:10). Thus, when Paul urges his readers to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (4:1), the calling he is referring to is this task of divine embodiment. He is telling them that they must live as the physical representation of God and his attributes, representing them in the world. But Paul does not stop with that exhortation to let his readers figure out how to do this by themselves. Instead, in the rest of chapters 4—6, he lists specific ethical imperatives that they can perform to successfully accomplish their mission. As they perform these duties, the church grows more fully into the image of Christ (4:13) and extends the presence of God into the entire world. On the basis of, and in connection to, this conclusion, I would like to make some suggestions for further research in the areas of New Testament studies, Systematic Theology, and Christian Praxis.

First, in New Testament studies, more research needs to be done on the embodiment theme in Pauline Ecclesiology and Ethics. I have attempted to make some obvious connections with what I call the divine embodiment theme in Ephesians to Paul’s description of the church as “the body of Christ” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” in his other epistles. But I think that a fascinating course of study would be to try to connect Paul’s imperatives for believers to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17) with this theme. The idea in these passages is
that Paul is representing Christ’s nature and character traits so well that he believes that they can look to him as an example as if they were looking at Christ himself (c.f. Gal. 2:20). Paul sets himself up as a prototype of the Christian that is called to represent Christ in the world through ethical praxis. This could serve to strengthen the connection between the believer’s individual imitation of Christ and the community’s collective imitation. If there is shown to be a connection to the theme in Pauline studies, then it would be even more interesting to trace the origins back to Jesus. Did Jesus desire that his followers embody him and his actions in the world? Possibly, Jesus’ imperatives to the disciples to “follow me” (Matt. 4:19; 16:24–26) or his sending out of the 12 disciples to drive out evil spirits and heal the sick (Matt. 10), which were the same works that he was doing, can connect to this theme. If this is done, then one could argue that the foundation for NT ethics is imitation/embodiment of the divine.

Second, in the area of Systematic Theology, I submit that my conclusions about the church’s calling in Ephesians provide biblical support for Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s ideas about the relationship between Christ and the church. For Bonhoeffer, Christ and the church have been united so intimately, that he can speak of the church as “Christ existing as church community.” In his Discipleship, Bonhoeffer makes statements similar to the conclusions of this present study:

The body of Jesus Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has assumed. The body of Christ is his church-community. Jesus Christ at the same time is himself and his church-community (1 Cor. 12:12). Since Pentecost Jesus Christ lives here on earth in the form of his body, the church-community. Here is

243 This does not mean that Paul is being prideful here. Obviously, he sees Christ himself as the ultimate example [Gordon D. Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 490]. In fact, in the case of the Phil. 3 passage, Paul had already told them to imitate Christ in his sacrificial attitude (2:5–11) before telling them to imitate him. What Paul is doing is setting up a visible example of Christ, who is physically absent via the ascension, because Christ is living through Paul (Gal. 2:20).

his body crucified and risen, here is the humanity he assumed. To be baptized therefore means to become a member of the church-community, a member of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13). To be in Christ means to be in the church-community. But if we are in the church-community, then we are also truly and bodily in Jesus Christ. This insight reveals the full richness of meaning contained in the concept of the body of Christ. Since the ascension, Jesus Christ’s place on earth has been taken by his body, the church. The church is the present Christ himself. With this statement, we are recovering an insight about the church which has been almost totally forgotten. While we are used to thinking of the church as an institution, we ought instead to think of it as a person with a body, although of course a person in a unique sense.\textsuperscript{245}

I submit that, on the basis of this study and Bonhoeffer’s statements, the church should begin to do ecclesiology with the starting point of the church as person. This would be incredibly helpful for work in ecumenical studies where the unity of the church could be stressed. Both Ephesians and Bonhoeffer call the diverse members of the church to sacrifice their personal preferences in order to preserve the unity of the body, of which they are a part.

Third, in the area of Christian Praxis, beginning with individual laypersons, if Christian believers truly understood the grand vision of the calling of the church that Paul presents in Ephesians, it would change their entire perspective on personal ethics. Instead of just trying not to “do the wrong thing” in each of their moral choices, they would be able to make an ethical decision based on which option would help the body of Christ, of which they are members, more greatly embody the attributes of Christ in the world. This is an empowering basis on which to make decisions. Furthermore, an understanding of this truth would also greatly impact their entire perspective on personal calling. Believers often struggle with separating their lives into physical and spiritual spheres. When they are at church, they are living for God, but in their work or vocation, they are working for their own advancement. Ephesians 4—6 makes it clear, however, that one cannot separate these spheres so easily. Whatever individual believers do in

their “everyday lives” affects the church’s ability to accomplish her role to embody God in the world. A good question for them to ask themselves would be, “How can I work in my vocation to help the church accomplish her calling?” If believers started thinking this way, their “everyday lives” would be transformed into a grand cosmic mission field.

Moving on to church leaders, understanding the role of the church according to Ephesians, should encourage selflessness on the part of pastors, elders, deacons, etc. Ephesians 4:11–12 makes it clear that leaders are given, not to promote their own advancement, to equip the saints for ministry so that the body of Christ is built up. Also, when preaching on ethical topics, pastors and teachers must follow Paul’s example and tell the grand story of the church’s calling before expounding on moral commands. If they fail to do this, then the parishioners will tend toward the two ugly extremes of legalism or apathy for lack of proper motivation. People need to know that they can participate in God’s grand narrative.

Finally, Ephesians, being a circular letter distributed to many congregations in Asia Minor, is also applicable to entire congregations. Instead of competing over numbers or impact on the community, which is a typical accusation of the Evangelical church in America especially, Paul would encourage congregations to work together in their local contexts. By partnering with each other, and operating out of sacrificial love toward each other, congregations would truly exhibit Christ to their communities and would probably draw more people into relationship with the God whom they are embodying. These suggestions for Christian praxis may seem overwhelmingly difficult to implement, which is why believers must constantly rely on God who, as Paul states, “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen” (Eph. 3:20–21).
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