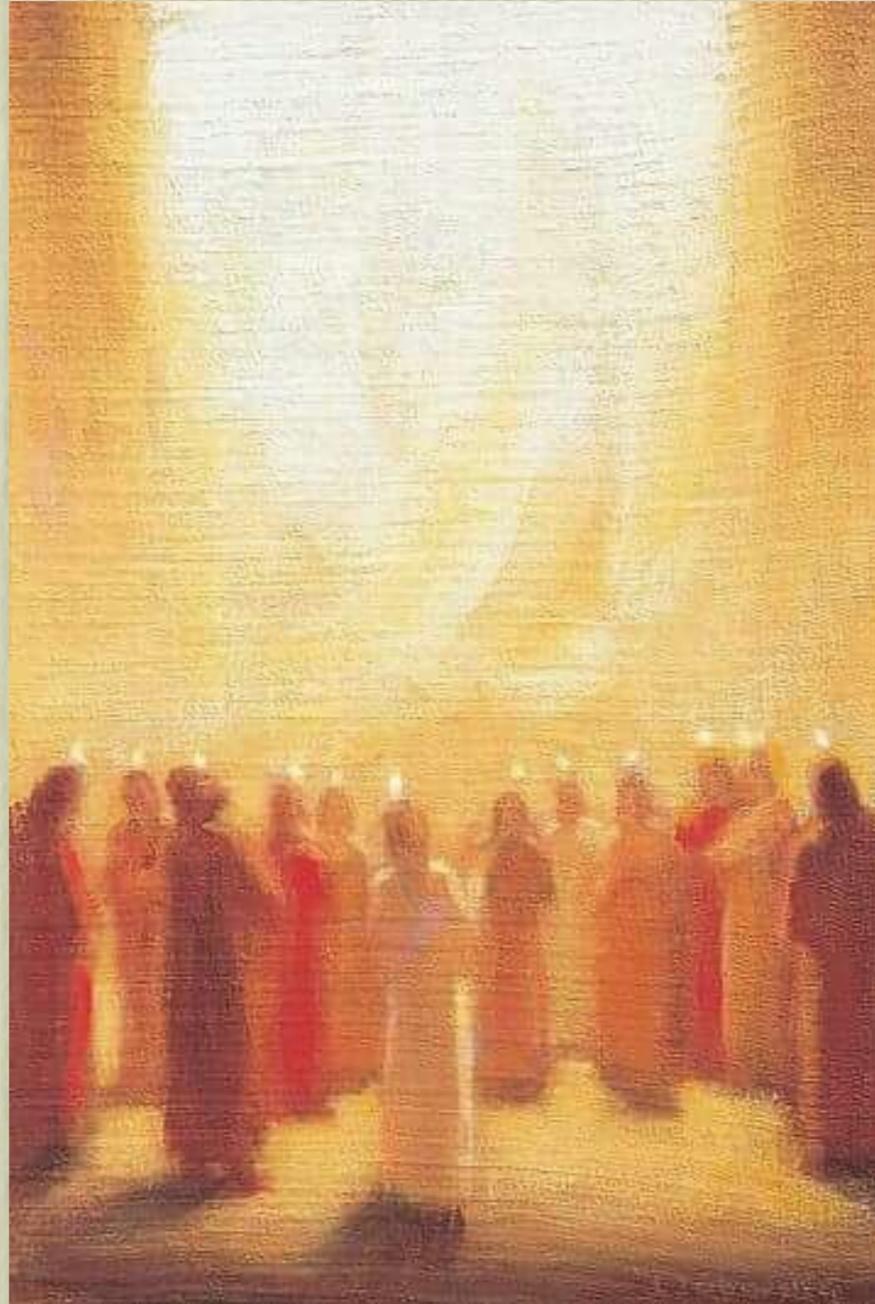


08. Ephesians 4:11 - 5:20



Ephesians 4:11

It is the Messiah who gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers

A comparison with the lists of ministries given in 1Corinthians 12:28 and Romans 12:6-8 helps to highlight three special features of verse eleven. First, it is the people with the ministries who are spoken of here as gifts.

Second, it is the exalted Jesus who gives them as gifts to us.

Third, the list is quite precise in its focus, which is on the gospel, not on church organisational leadership.

Ephesians 4:11

It is the Messiah who gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers

Note that Paul does not name the overseers (bishops), presbyters (priests), or deacons. They are not excluded, but are included only insofar as they have the gifts which he mentions: gifts of proclaiming the gospel and helping us to grasp its message: apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors.

In this context, 'pastors' should be understood in terms of their ministry of discerning, exhorting and encouraging the members of the church in their faith and understanding of the gospel.

Ephesians 4:12

It is the Messiah who gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the Messiah's body

In these magnificent words, Paul proclaims that the exalted Jesus has graced these people in a special way and given them to the church in order to maintain unity and build communion. As is clear, unity does not mean uniformity, and communion does not mean conformity. The church is a living organism, and the risen Messiah has given us these graced ministers 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry'. He does not attempt to name the various ways in which we carry out the church's ministry (they no doubt varied then, as now, from community to community). His accent is on 'building up the Messiah's body'.

Ephesians 4:13

until all of us come to the **unity** of the faith and of the **knowledge** of the Son of God, to **maturity**, to the measure of the Messiah's **full stature**

Paul speaks of three key aspects of this 'building up of the Messiah's body'. The first is '**knowledge**', which has been a recurring theme of this letter. Not any kind of knowledge but knowledge '**of the Son of God**': knowledge of Jesus precisely in the intimacy of his communion with the Father. This knowledge, as Paul has repeatedly insisted (see 1:17-19; 3:18-19), is not something which we can acquire for ourselves. It is knowledge that comes from God and is based, therefore, on '**faith**'. It is knowledge received only in love. It is knowing, not knowing about. Paul's focus becomes even clearer when we note his accent on '**unity**' in our faith-knowledge. Unity, too, has been a recurring theme.

Ephesians 4:13

until all of us come to the **unity** of the faith and of the **knowledge** of the Son of God, to **maturity**, to the measure of the Messiah's **full stature**

The second aspect of the 'building up' is our coming to **adulthood** (compare Colossians 1:28). The contrast is with remaining children (see verse fourteen).

The third aspect picks up another recurring theme: that of 'fullness'. Verse ten speaks of the Messiah's exaltation as being '**that he might fill all things**'. We receive this fullness in and through '**the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all**' (1:23). We receive this fullness by '**knowing the love of the Messiah**' (3:19), and the Messiah has graced us with people gifted with ministries that equip us for this knowledge.

Ephesians 4:14

so that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming

Paul presents the alternative to this growth. He makes no attempt to define the false doctrines in any way. He may be referring to things they learned prior to their conversion (see 3:2-3). He is probably including some of the ideas which he mentioned in his letter to the Colossians. His interest here is not in opposing errors. His point is that whatever their source or content (and there would have been local variations), the antidote is found in the unity of faith that is the Risen Lord's gift to the church. It is this unity, with its wonderful diversity, that we must cherish.

The antidote is found in knowing Jesus.

Ephesians 4:15-16

confessing the truth [ἀληθεύω - speaking and doing the truth] **in love**, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into the Messiah, from whom the whole body, joined together and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Paul is still describing the Exalted Jesus' purpose in giving to the church those to whom he has given special gifts to proclaim the gospel and expound the mystery to which he has been referring throughout. Christ has given us these gifts so that, knowing Christ through sharing his communion with the Father, and recognising God's design that all share in this communion by living together as members of the church, we will '**confess the truth**'. The truth to which Paul is referring is '**the word of truth, the gospel**' (1:13), and our confession is to be in word and in deed. Like everything else, it is to be '**in love**'.

Ephesians 4:15

we must grow up in every way into him who is the head

Our maturing, as Paul has already said, is to be **‘to the measure of the full stature of the Messiah’** (4:13). Once again Paul refers to him as ‘the head’. He is the source of our life and of our harmonious growth. Everything is in view of our ever deepening communion with him, a communion into which we grow together through our mutual love as members of his body.

He is ‘the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God’ (Colossians 2:19).

Ephesians 4:16

the whole body, joined together [συναρμολογεω, 2:21] and knit together [συμβιβάζω - compare Colossians 2:19] by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

Paul is referring, not to part of the body, but to 'the whole body'. Everyone is involved. No one is excluded. All have a role to play, and all are called. Paul is speaking of the diversity in the church which is one because of the organic cohesion of the various parts, each of which has its contribution to make, and all of which work together for the good of the whole.

It is Jesus who gives to each one what is needed so that each can contribute to the harmony of the whole, as the church, his body, is being built up 'in love'.

They must change from their former behaviour and live Jesus' life (4:17-24)

4:17-19

This I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart. They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to uncontrolled self-gratification, to the point of indulging in all kinds of impurity and greed.

Paul follows his plea for unity with a solemn declaration that being a member of the Church as a Christian Gentile demands a lifestyle radically different from that of the pagan Gentile world – a world to which they once belonged when they were ‘**dead through the trespasses and sins**’ (2:1,5). He makes this declaration with all his apostolic authority ‘**in the Lord**’.

They have lost all sensitivity and have abandoned themselves to uncontrolled self-gratification, to the point of indulging in all kinds of impurity and greed.

Paul's description of the immorality prevalent in the pagan world is typical of Jewish writings of the time. It fits with the longer description found in Romans 1:18-32, even to echoing certain phrases: 'they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened' (Romans 1:21); 'the lusts of their hearts' (Romans 1:24).

There are even closer connections with Paul's description in Colossians of those who 'were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds' (Colossians 1:21): 'Put to death whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry) ... These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life' (Colossians 3:5,7).

In Colossians Paul is making a straightforward comparison between the way they used to live and the way they should live now. Here, Paul is describing one way of living as a Gentile (the pagan way) in order to make a contrast in the following verses with another way of living as a Gentile (the Christian way).

Throughout the letter, Paul has been insisting on the importance of knowledge. The opening hymn declared that ‘God has made known to us the mystery of his will’ (1:9). Paul’s prayer is that ‘God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you’ (1:17-18); and ‘that you may know the love of Christ’ (3:19).

Consistent with this is his focus here on the connection between the darkness of their minds, their ignorance and hardness of heart, and the immorality of their lives. Not 'knowing' God, not 'knowing the Messiah' (a knowledge experienced only in the intimacy of loving communion), the pagan Gentiles have abandoned the only life that can satisfy them - the life of God - and, in desperation, have given themselves up to unrestrained, wanton, ruthless, dissolute indulgence of all their unresolved, discordant desires - what Paul calls elsewhere 'works of the flesh'.

All of this is only a vain attempt to fill up the emptiness. Everything is taken to excess. There is no direction, no harmony, no beauty, and no peace.

Ephesians 4:20-22

That is not the way you learned the Messiah! for surely you have heard about him and were taught in him, as truth is in Jesus, to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts

Paul reminds them of the gospel which they have heard (see 1:13). They have ‘**learned the Messiah**’; that is to say, they have been taught to follow Jesus as his disciples. We learn him by contemplating the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The word μαθητης (‘disciple’) comes from the verb μαρναω (‘learn’). Knowledge of Jesus, in the sense already clarified – knowing him through communion in love (see 3:19) – is an essential condition for living a moral life as a disciple, just as knowing him is an essential condition for the harmonious growth of the church (see 4:13).

Ephesians 4:23-24

to be renewed by the spiritual transformation of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in the righteousness and respect for the sacred which come from the truth.

Paul has already put what he is saying here, and what he is about to say concerning morality, into a quite specific context. Christian morality can be understood only to the extent that we grasp the ‘mystery’ of the Gospel that we have been taught. A Christian moral life can be lived only ‘**in Jesus**’, only as part of his body, the church in which we live, from which we receive, and to which we contribute. The primary moral imperative, as Paul presents it, is to work for the building up of the church in love, for it is in this communion only, as part of the ‘**one new humanity**’ that Jesus ‘created in himself’ (2:15), that we can truly learn to be disciples of Jesus.

‘Be transformed by the renewing of your minds’ (Romans 12:2).

‘You must get rid of all such things ... seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator’ (Colossians 3:8-10).

We must continue to contemplate Jesus: ‘All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The demands of living in harmony (Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2)

Ephesians 4:25

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

In keeping with his focus on the importance of unity in the church and of building up the body of the Messiah, for its own harmony and for its mission in and to the world, Paul directs his teaching first to those vices that undermine community. No community can survive without trust, and trust demands that we ‘speak the truth to our neighbours’. We recall his earlier statement: ‘confessing/doing the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into the Messiah’ (4:15) . It is not just a matter of avoiding lies; it is a matter of ensuring that our communication with each other is based on the truth that is ‘in Jesus’ (4:21), ‘the word of truth, the gospel’ (1:13). Notice Paul’s reason for insisting on our confessing the truth in word and in deed: ‘we are members of one another’.

Ephesians 4:26-27

Be angry (ὀργίζω) **but do not sin** (Psalm 4:4);
do not let the sun go down on your anger (παροργισμος),
and do not make room for the devil.

His second exhortation concerns anger (ὀργη), which, if uncontrolled, can destroy a community. He quotes Psalm 4:4 which accepts that there is a just anger, but he recognises also that anger generally results, not from concerned love, but from a loss of temper. Anger, even just anger, can pick up other emotions. It is to these that Paul is referring when he tells us ‘**do not let the sun go down on your ‘anger’**’. These can lead to exasperation, bitterness and sin. It is important, therefore, to attempt to resolve the cause of anger quickly.

The word ‘devil’ (διαβόλος) means ‘liar’, and there is an allusion here to the sin of Cain (compare John 8:44).

Ephesians 4:28

Thieves must give up **stealing**; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy.

Stealing also destroys trust. Instead of taking from others, we should work hard to be able to contribute to them in their need.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no **evil talk** come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

We are to avoid 'evil talk' (σαπρὸς). The image evoked is that of rotten fruit. The rottenness is catching. We are to build up the community (a constant theme in this letter), not only by sharing material support, but also by the gracious words that come from our lips.

Ephesians 4:30

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption [see 1:13].

‘The Lord became their saviour in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit’ (Isaiah 63:8-10).

If we behave in the ways Paul has been describing, we sin against communion, and we, too, have forgotten God’s love. It is this that grieves the Holy Spirit. We must not forget that we have been ‘marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory’ (1:13-14).

Ephesians 4:31-32

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Once again, Paul appeals to us to put aside any behaviour that injures community. Instead we are to have three qualities that are characteristic of God.

We are to be 'kind' [χρηστος, 2:7; one of the fruits of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22),

'tenderhearted' [εὐσπλαγχνος], (only here in the New Testament)

and 'forgiving' (χαρίζομαι, see 2 Corinthians 2:10).

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹Be imitators of God, as beloved children, ²and live in love, as the Messiah loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

In introducing this section on the Christian life, Paul spoke of ‘learning the Messiah’ (4:20), and of ‘the truth that is in Jesus’ (4:21). He concludes by appealing to us to ‘be imitators of God as beloved children’ - something which we can learn only from ‘the Son of God’ (4:13). To imitate God, therefore, is to ‘live in love’, or, as Paul has already said, to be ‘rooted and grounded in love’ (3:17).

We can do this only if we open our hearts to the love which Jesus offers us. If we welcome Jesus' love into our 'inner being' he will join our offering to his. Paul echoes his words to the Galatians: 'The Messiah lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).

Sharing in this life of God's Son, we are able to grow towards the kind of perfection which belongs to our Father (Matthew 5:48), by being 'merciful, just as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36).

Ephesians 5:3-14 - Sexual Morality

Ephesians 5:3

Fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints.

Paul has just been speaking of love. He turns to the perversion of our energies of love that happens when our sexual energies are focused on self-gratification, or, worse still, when we use others as objects for lust rather than channel our sexual energy into true love. Granted the central place of love, and granted the power of our sexuality to energise love in a beautiful way or to pervert it, we are not surprised at how frequently Paul comes back to this subject.

When he speaks of 'the works of the flesh' in his letter to the Galatians, Paul begins with fornication and impurity and declares: 'those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God' (Galatians 5:19,21).

Ephesians 5:3-14 - Sexual Morality

Ephesians 5:3

Fornication and impurity of any kind, or **greed** must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints.

Greed (πλεονεξία) is the distortion of desire whereby we grasp at something just to possess it and then just as impulsively squander it. In the sexual area it covers all kinds of sexual abuse that are motivated by wanton lust and the urge to exercise power over others.

In 1 Thessalonians Paul warns against fornication, impurity and ‘exploiting’ others (πλεονεκτέω). He adds: ‘the Lord is an avenger in all these things’ (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). In his correspondence with the Corinthians, he includes ‘fornicators’ and the ‘greedy’ among those who will not ‘inherit the kingdom of God’ (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Ephesians 5:4-6 (see Colossians 3:6-8)

Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be **thanksgiving**. Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes on those who are disobedient.

Making a god of sexual desire and its gratification indicates a failure to recognise sexuality as an expression of a more profound yearning which can be satisfied only in communion with God. When we lose ourselves in superficial and insensitive self-gratification, we separate ourselves from the reign of God's love. We forgo our destined heritage. We are already experiencing **'the wrath of God'** in the terrible effects of our perverted behaviour. Paul exhorts us to live the kind of life that is 'proper among saints', a life characterised by **'thanksgiving'**.

Ephesians 5:7-9

Therefore do not be associated with them. For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are **light**. Live as children of light — for the **fruit** of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

To the Romans Paul speaks of ‘waking from sleep, for ... the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light’ (Romans 13:11-12). Whereas the pagans are ‘**darkened in their understanding**’ (Ephesians 4:18), the Christian Gentiles are to ‘**live as children of the light**’ – something which they can do only ‘**in the Lord**’.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul speaks of ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (Galatians 5:22). Here he sums up the ‘**fruit of light**’ as ‘**all that is good and right and true**’. As is the case throughout the letter, ‘truth’ refers to ‘the word of truth, the gospel’ (1:13).

Ephesians 5:10-14

Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, *'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'*

It is not enough that we reject behaviour that is evil. We must take up the task of exposing evil by bringing everything into the light. Bathed in his light, we are to radiate his light to others, for it is the light of Christ that will dispel the darkness which envelops people's lives: 'It is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The concluding quotation is possibly from a baptismal hymn.

Ephesians 5:15-20 - Behaviour in the Assembly

Ephesians 5:15-16

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

The resurrection of Christ is seen by Paul as a definitive act of God, issuing in the final stage of history, in which we prepare for the coming of Christ in judgment and the transformation of the whole of creation in communion with him. In this final stage we are engaged in a life and death struggle between light and darkness (see 1Corinthians 7:26). Evil has already been conquered, but it is unleashing all its energy in a last desperate effort to hold its prey (see 6:11-12,16). It is this which makes the days 'evil' (see Galatians 1:4).

Paul exhorts us to ‘**make the most of the time**’ [ἐξαγοράζω]. As he has just insisted in the previous section, he wants us to be armed with the light of Christ, and to go into the world (into the marketplace (ἀγορά), and be his instruments in redeeming those who are slaves of darkness. There is no simple formula for this: it will require wisdom and a constant discernment of God’s will (compare Romans 12:2).

Ephesians 5:17-20

So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus the Messiah

Paul uses the metaphor of strong drink to highlight the powerful influence of the Spirit in our lives. He reminds us that we are to be **'filled with the Spirit'** whenever we come together to share as Christians. He speaks of the liturgy in which we gather as a community to **'give thanks'** (εὐχαριστέω).

In the Eucharist we celebrate the real presence of the Risen Jesus in and among us, binding us together as his body, nurturing us, and drawing us into deeper communion with his passion and resurrection as we partake of his body broken for us and his blood poured out for us. The Spirit that fills us there is the Spirit of Jesus, through whom we experience adoption as children of the Father (1:5). Paul began his letter with a song of praise. We are to give voice to such a song whenever we assemble as Jesus' brothers and sisters.