

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON LXXXIX : UNITY AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE CONGREGATION OF BELIEVERS (4:1-16)

Ephesians 4:13 —

till we every one (in the vnitie of fayth and knowledge of the sonne of god) growe vp vnto a parfayte man after the measure of age of the fulnes of Christ. (Tyndale's New Testament, 1524)

Till we all meete together (in the vnitie of faith and that acknowledging of the Sonne of God) vnto a perfite man, and vnto the measure of the age of the fulnesse of Christ, (Geneva Bible, 1599)

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (King James Version, 1769)

till we may all come to the unity of the faith and of the recognition of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to a measure of stature of the fulness of the Christ, (Young's Literal Translation, 1898)

till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (Revised Version, 1885)

till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: (American Standard Version, 1901)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; (Revised Standard Version, 1952)

till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; (New King James Version, 1982)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (New American Standard Version, 1995)

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (New International Version, 2011)

until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (English Standard Version, 2016)

μέχρι καταστήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Stephanus Greek NT, 1550)

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ONE SINGLE GOAL EXPRESSED POSITIVELY BY THREE PREPOSITIONAL PHRASES — Paul expresses the goal negatively in the next verse. Positively:

- *till we may all come to the unity of the faith and of the recognition of the Son of God,* (YLT)
- *to a perfect man,* (YLT)
- *to a measure of stature of the fulness of the Christ,* (YLT)

“Immediately following are three prepositional phrases, each introduced by the preposition εἰς [eis], ‘to.’ Although the three prepositional phrases in verse 12 denote the purpose and goals for the giving of the gifts, the three prepositional phrases in verse 13 signify **not three separate goals but three aspects of the one goal of attaining maturity.**” [Hoehner, 552f] **“The three prepositional phrases may appear to provide three distinct goals but there can only be one goal; they must therefore be seen as drawing out different aspects of that one goal.** How then do they relate to one another? What is the one goal? Since the sentence continues to v. 16 we are not yet at a stage where we can answer the second of these questions; v. 16 suggests that the goal is the complete growth of the body of Christ; this would not be out of accord with what we have learnt from the three phrases. As for the first question, **each phrase in v. 13 incorporates a reference to Christ involving an understanding of him and a relation to him.** The church also is involved as the body of which he is head and as that which understands him and is to attain maturity through its relation to him. It is towards this goal that the ministry is to work by drawing in all members of the church so that they also take their place in working towards the goal.” [Best, 403] “What is this goal? Paul describes it in three parallel prepositional phrases, each beginning with εἰς [eis]. Unlike the three prepositional phrases in 4:12, these phrases do not build on each other but view the same result from different angles.” [Thielman, 281]

QUALITY RATHER THAN QUANTITY — *“Since nothing is said about the missionary activity of ministers or believers in general, the goal must be an inward maturity and not an outward growth in numbers. This does not mean that [Paul] was not interested in numerical growth; that is not his subject here; had there been no growth in numbers the churches to which he is writing would never have come into existence. Once in existence they cannot stand still but must mature or drop back.”* [Best, 403]

until we ‘arrive, attain, reach, come to’ — μέχρι καταντήσωμεν [mechri katantēsōmen] — **‘THE GOAL OF A JOURNEY YET TO BE ATTAINED’** — *The words used here by Paul points towards a goal, the end of a journey that has not yet been attained.* [Best, 399; see also Lincoln, 255; Muddiman, 202; Ellicott, 95f] *The usage however points to the event as expected and not as a mere hypothetical possibility.* [Salmond, 332] *This journey can be either geographical or spiritual as here.* The verb is used thirteen times in the NT, four times by Paul (once here in our verse Eph 4:13):

‘Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.’ (1 Cor 10:11 NKJV; referring to the end of the age)

‘Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?’ (1 Cor 14:36 NKJV)

‘if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.’ (Phil 3:11 NKJV)

Outside of Paul it occurs only in Acts, all of which (except Acts 26:7) speak of travelers arriving or reaching their destinations. “Hence, it means to reach, arrive, or attain a goal. The goal is set, the end determined, and [this word] simply denotes the meeting of this set goal and prescribed conclusion. Thus it can be translated ‘reach’ (JB, NIV, NJB) or ‘attain’ (RV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NEB).” [Hoehner, 552] *“Those given by Christ as ‘ministers’ (v. 11), along with the ‘saints’ (v. 12), render their service so that God’s people might reach this objective, and they are to continue serving until it is attained.”* [O’Brien, 305] *“The meaning is, that not only is there a blessed point in spiritual advancement set before the church, and that till such a point be gained the Christian ministry will be continued, but also and primarily, that the grand purpose of a continued pastorate in the church is to enable the church to gain a climax which it will certainly reach; for that climax is neither indefinite in its nature nor contingent in its futurity.”* [Eadie, 310]

THE LIFE-LONG DISCIPLING OF THE BELIEVER — “Paul had already said, that by the ministry of men the church is regulated and governed, so as to attain the highest perfection. But his commendation of the ministry is now carried farther. *The necessity for which he had pleaded is not confined to a single day, but continues to the end. Or, to speak more plainly, he reminds his readers that the use of the ministry is not temporal, like that of a school for children, but constant, so long as we remain in the world. Enthusiasts dream that the use of the ministry ceases as soon as we have been led to Christ. Proud men, who carry their desire of knowledge beyond what is proper, look down with contempt on the elementary instruction of childhood. But Paul maintains that we must persevere in this course till all our deficiencies are supplied; that we must make progress till death, under the teaching of Christ alone; and that we must not be ashamed to be the scholars of the church, to which Christ has committed our education.*” [Calvin, 282f]

WHILE SOME OF THE OFFICES MAY HAVE BEEN TEMPORARY, THE MINISTRY REMAINS — *“The ministry is not a temporary institution, it is to continue until the church has reached the goal of its high calling. This does not prove that all the offices mentioned above are permanent. By common consent the prophets were temporary officers. It is the ministry and not those particular offices, that is to continue.”* [Hodge, 165]

until ‘we all’ — οἱ πάντες [hoi pantes] — **WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER** — this is not a reference to all mankind (contra Jerome) which would be against the context, but ‘we, we as a whole, the whole body, the believers, the whole including every individual,’ hence the need for so many gifts. [Abbott, 120; Robertson, Word Pictures] *“Towards this goal we all should strive, [including Paul himself] ... the idea of striving is in keeping with the hortatory sense of 4.1–6.20. οἱ πάντες [hoi pantes, ‘the all’] may seem unnecessary, yet on the one hand it prevents the striving being over-individualised as if it said ‘each of us’, and on the other depersonalised as if it said ‘let our communities.’ ... Believers require to strive, not each individually, but together, cooperating with and helping one another; no one is exempt from this striving.”* [Best, 400] “The article οἱ (hoi) with πάντες (pantes, all) emphasizes that *the whole is made up of individuals. It ‘gathers all the particulars under one view’ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:17; Rom. 11:32). The picture is of all believers employing the gifts Christ has given to them in order to reach a goal that will likewise involve them all.*” [Thielman, 280f] *“Significantly, Christian growth or progress does not occur in isolation, for Paul’s language here envisages God’s people collectively (we all) as en route to this vital destination.”* [O’Brien, 305] *“Under the term [‘we all’], as a complete whole, the Apostle includes himself; it is therefore implied ... even the greatest, the Apostles, are in need of progress towards the goal, are not yet there, even although in advance of others, but further their own progress when they labor for others.”* [Lange, 151f] “One should note that all, not just some, are to attain the goal set before us.... The ‘all’ is mentioned because we are all being prepared for the work of the ministry with the goal of building up the body of Christ of which we are all a part.” [Hoehner, 552]

‘to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God’ — εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ [eis tēn henotēta tēs pisteōs kai tēs epignōseōs tou huiou tou theou] — **THE FIRST GOAL IS THE UNITY THAT COMES FROM A COMMON FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE** — the first goal of the ministers and the saints in the building up of the body of Christ (v. 12) is defined as unity (with the definite article), this definite unity being denoted by ‘the faith’ and ‘the knowledge’ of the Son of God. [Salmond, 332; see also Bruce, 350] *“Nevertheless, the unity of Christian faith and knowledge does provide a contrast to the mention of diverse winds of teaching in the next verse, and it is the task of the*

pastor and teachers, who are Christ's gifts to his Church, to ensure that there is progressive movement toward the goal of full appropriation of the one faith and of the one knowledge of Christ." [Lincoln, 256] *"[T]he unity is probably that which belongs to, or comes from, a common faith and knowledge.... [A] dynamic faith brings a dynamic knowledge of Christ, which in turn produces more faith. This is similar to the way love always supercedes our knowledge. The more knowledge of his love, the more overwhelming it is (cf. 3:19).*" [Hoehner, 553f] *"The apostle has already in this chapter introduced the idea of unity, and has shown that difference of gifts and office is not incompatible with it; and now he shows that the variety of offices in the church of Christ is intended to secure it."* [Eadie, 310] "Faith and knowledge express or comprehend all the elements of that state of mind of which the Son of God, God manifested in the flesh, who loved us and gave himself for us, who died on Calvary and is now enthroned in heaven, is the object. A state of mind which includes the apprehension of his glory, the appropriation of his love, as well as confidence and devotion. This state of mind is in itself eternal life. It includes excellence, blessedness, and the highest form of activity, i. e. the highest exercise of our highest powers." [Hodge, 166]

THE 'ALREADY / NOT YET' TENSION EVIDENT THROUGHOUT THE NT — *"While unity is assumed as something given in 4:3, it is still something toward which Christians must work."* [Snodgrass, 205] *"The unity which has been inaugurated in Christ through the events described in 2:11-22, and which the readers are strongly urged to maintain (i.e., 'the unity of the Spirit', v. 3), is here spoken of as a unity to which they are to attain. This oneness thus partakes of the tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet': it has been proclaimed as a given fact, but is now presented as the goal of Christian endeavour, a goal which can only be reached by all collectively, and will finally occur at Christ's coming, when he brings his people to complete maturity."* [O'Brien, 306] "The only other time the word ἐνότης [henotēta, from ἐνότης, henotēs], 'unity,' is used in biblical literature is in verse 3 where Paul exhorts believers to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Here in verse 13 the goal refers to the effort made in order to preserve the unity." [Hoehner, 553; see also Bruce, 350] *"Perfection, indeed, in an absolute sense, cannot be enjoyed on earth, either personally or socially. But the apostle speaks of the results of the Christian ministry as exercised in the church below; for that faith to which Christians are to come exists not in its present phase in heaven, but is swallowed up in vision. Had faith been described only as a means, the heavenly state might have been formally referred to. Still the terms employed indicate a state of perfection that has never been realized, either by the apostolic or by any other church. Phil. iii. 13. Our own view is ... that the apostle places this destiny of the church on earth, but does not say whether on earth that destiny is ever realized.... For the church on earth gradually passes into the church in heaven, and when it reaches perfection, the Christian ministry, which remains till we come to this unity, will be superseded. In such sketches the apostle holds up an ideal which, by the aim and labour of the Christian pastorate, is partially realized on earth, and ought to be more vividly manifested; but which will be fully developed in heaven, when, the effect being secured, the instrumentality may be dispensed with."* [Eadie, 312] "It has excited surprise that the apostle should here present unity of faith as the goal of perfection, whereas in ver. 6, Christians are said now to have 'one faith,' as they have one Lord and one baptism.... There is no real difficulty in the case. *Unity is a matter of degrees. The church is now and ever has been one body, but how imperfect is their union! Our Lord's praying that his people may be one, does not prove that they are not now one. It is here as in other cases. Holiness is the beginning and holiness is the end. We must be holy to belong to the church, and yet holiness is the ultimate perfection of the church. The unity of faith is now confined to the first principles; the unity of faith contemplated in this place is that perfect unity which implies perfect knowledge and perfect holiness.*" [Hodge, 166f]

FAITH – OBJECTIVE OR SUBJECTIVE? — while most of the commentators understand this faith to be objective ('the doctrines held by believers') rather than our subjective faith in Christ ('the exercise of our faith'), both senses make good sense and is true. Comments from those who consider it as being objective:

"In the light of the syntactical connection between faith and knowledge, the immediate context with its emphasis on instruction (v. 11), the reference to steadfastness in the face of false teaching (v. 14), and the likelihood that faith in v. 5 refers to that which is believed, it is best understood here in terms of its objective content rather than the readers' activity of believing. The point being made, then, is that God's people are moving towards the goal of appropriating all that is included in the one faith." [O'Brien, 306; see also Best, 400; Hoehner, 553]

"Those who equip the saints for the work of ministry in 4:11 are all teachers, and in 4:14-15 Paul will say that a sign of the maturity toward which the church is moving is its purity from false teaching. 'The unity of the faith,' then, refers to unity in acknowledging a particular body of doctrine, the 'one faith' of 4:5." [Thielman, 281]

"It is not primarily believers' exercise of faith that is in view but rather the content of that faith (cf. also Col 1:23; 2:7). The idea is of the whole Church moving toward the appropriation of all that is contained in its one faith." [Lincoln, 255]

"The ultimate spiritual target for the church begins with the unity of the faith (cf. v. 3). As in verse 5, faith does not here refer to the act of belief or of obedience but to the body of Christian truth, to Christian doctrine. The faith is the content of the gospel in its most complete form. As the church at Corinth so clearly illustrates, disunity in the church comes from doctrinal ignorance and spiritual immaturity. When believers are properly taught, when they faithfully do the work of service, and when the body is thereby built up in spiritual maturity, unity of the faith is an inevitable result. **Oneness in fellowship is impossible unless it is built on the foundation of commonly believed truth.** The solution to the divisions in Corinth was for everyone to hold the same understandings and opinions and to speak the same truths (1 Cor. 1:10). God's truth is not fragmented and divided against itself, and when His people are fragmented and divided it simply means they are to that degree apart from His truth, apart from the faith of right knowledge and understanding. Only a biblically equipped, faithfully serving, and spiritually maturing church can attain to the unity the faith. Any other unity will be on a purely human level and not only will be apart from but in constant conflict with the unity of the faith. There can never be

unity in the church apart from doctrinal integrity.” [MacArthur, 156f]

But there are those who emphasizes the subjective faith:

“‘Unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son’ is not merely unity in the ideas that we believe, but a unity resulting from the experience of receiving the gospel and living with Christ.” [Snodgrass, 205]



“The word of God can be in the mind without being in the heart; but it cannot be in the heart without first being in the mind.” – R.C. Sproul



‘GROWING IN OUR PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST’ — *“Encompassed in the first component of the goal is not only the achievement of unity of the faith but also the unity in ‘the knowledge of the Son of God.’ The term ἐπιγνώσις [epignōsis], ‘knowledge’, ... is derived from two words: γνώσις [gnōseis], which is knowledge in the fullest sense and in the abstract, and the prepositional prefix ἐπι- [epi], which rather than intensity, denotes direction, that is, ‘knowledge directed towards a particular object, perceiving, discerning, recognizing.’”* [Hoehner, 553] *“‘Knowledge of the Son of God’ is more difficult to define.... [T]he compound term [epignōseōs] refers to a personal, experiential knowledge of God’s Son, around whom God’s plan for the universe revolves (cf. Phil. 3:8-11). If this is right, then in this first [‘to, into’] phrase Paul describes the goal of ‘the building up of the body of Christ’ as the unity of all its parts in a common set of doctrines and in a common experience of knowing the Christ on whom those doctrines are focused.”* [Thielman, 281; see also Bruce, 350; Snodgrass, 205] *“The unity in view, therefore, is oneness in faith in Christ and oneness also in the full experimental knowledge of Him.”* [Salmond, 332; see also Abbott, 120] *“It is not merely cognition but recognition.”* [Hodge, 166] *“[A]ttaining to the unity of*

the knowledge of the Son of God is likely to mean appropriating all that is involved in the salvation which centers in Christ.” [Lincoln, 255] *“Let us remember, that true faith confines its view so entirely to Christ, that it neither knows, nor desires to know, anything else.”* [Calvin, 283] There are differing degrees of knowing Christ; e.g.,

‘And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.’ (John 17:3 NKJV)

So for a person even to go to heaven requires but one thing: knowing Jesus Christ! But it does not stop with our initial act of faith which places us in Christ; Paul could say later:

‘Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.’ (Phil 3:8-11 NKJV)

“The second result of following God’s pattern for building His church is attaining the knowledge of the Son of God. Paul is not talking about salvation knowledge but about the deep knowledge (epignosis, full knowledge that is correct and accurate) through a relationship with Christ that comes only from prayer and faithful study of and obedience to God’s Word. After many years of devoted apostleship Paul still could say, ‘I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, . . . that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. . . . Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 3:8-10, 12). Paul prayed that the Ephesians would have that ‘knowledge of Him’ (1:17; cf. Phil. 1:4; Col. 1:9-10; 2:2). **Growing in the deeper knowledge of the Son of God is a life-long process that will not be complete until we see our Lord face-to-face. That is the knowing of which Jesus spoke when He said, ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them’ (John 10:27). He was not speaking of knowing their identities but of knowing them intimately, and that is the way He wants His people also to know Him.**” [MacArthur, 157]

‘of the Son of God’ — ONLY PLACE USED IN EPHESIANS — *“St. Paul is so careful in his use of the various designations of our Lord, that we may be confident that he has some reason here for inserting between two mentions of ‘the Christ’ this title, ‘the Son of God’, which does not occur elsewhere in the epistle. It is instructive to compare a passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, where a similar change of titles is made. ‘I have been crucified with Christ’, says the Apostle, ‘and I no longer live, but in me Christ lives: and the life which now I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me’. He with whom he has been crucified, He who now lives in Him, is ‘Christ’: He whose love brought Him down to suffer is ‘the Son of God’. The title is changes to one which recalls the glory which Christ had with the*

Father before the world was (John 17:5), in order to heighten the thought of His condescending love. And so in our present passage, when he is treating of the relations of our Lord to His Church, he speaks of Him as ‘the Christ’ (for the article is used in both places in the original): but when he would describe Him as the object of that faith and knowledge, in which our unity will ultimately be realised, he uses the words, ‘the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God’; thereby suggesting, as it would seem, the thought of His eternal existence in relation to the Divine Father.” [Robinson, 138f] “It is the only place in Ephesians where Christ is called the Son of God. In 1:17 the emphasis was on knowing God and here it is on knowing his Son, Jesus Christ. The emphasis has changed because of the subject of the context, that is, Christ’s bestowal of gifts (v 7) and gifted persons (v 11) to the church so that it may be built up not only in the unity of the faith but also in the unity of the knowledge of him. It must be asserted that such knowledge applies not only to individuals but to the body of believers who together come to a unity of the knowledge of Christ. This knowledge is not an abstract but a concrete knowledge of Christ, which is the opposite of the deceitful doctrines promoted by people as mentioned in verse 14.” [Hoehner, 554; see also Lincoln, 256; Muddiman, 203]

‘to a perfect man’ — εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον [eis andra teleion] — IS PAUL SPEAKING INDIVIDUALLY OR CORPORATELY? — Without any investigation, the most natural reading of this might be to understand it as speaking to individuals with the contrast following in the next verse:

‘we as individual believers are to grow up and become mature adults spiritually, so that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ...’ (Eph 4:13,14; author’s paraphrase)

But as the commentators note, there are great difficulties with that understanding:

- our word in this verse is **singular** (‘man’) in contrast with the word in the following verse being **plural** (‘children’, literally ‘very young children, infants, babes’); one would imagine Paul would have had both of these words either singular (‘to a mature man ... that we be no longer an infant’) or plural (‘to mature people ... that we be no longer infants’).
- the word Paul uses here is not the more common generic word for man: ἄνθρωπος [anthrōpos, ‘man, mankind, human being, a person of either sex’], rather the word used here is the more specific word for man: ἀνὴρ [anēr]. **BDAG** (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich) Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament defines it as follows: “an adult human male, man, husband; in contrast to a woman or a boy.” **Friberg’s Lexicon** defines this word as follows: “man; (1) in contrast to a woman *man, male* (MK 6.44); (2) as distinct from a boy (*adult*) *man* (1C 13.11); (3) in a marital context, whenever γυνή [gunē] (*woman, wife*) is present or implied in the passage *husband* (1C 7.3); (4) in a general sense, as equivalent to τις [tis] *someone, a person* (JN 1.30); calling attention to an individual, ἀνὴρ τις [anēr tis], *a certain man* (Luk 8:27).” **Paul was of course familiar with the distinctions between these words as he uses the more generic word for ‘man’ in 2:15, 4:14, 22-24; while using the more specific word for ‘husband’ in 5:22-33 (except 5:31 where he is quoting the OT). So while it is not impossible for this word to refer to a generic person, Paul would have probably used the much more common generic word if that was what he wanted to emphasize. We can only assume therefore Paul wanted to place the emphasis upon a singular male.**

“But is [Paul] referring to the manhood of individual believers, of Christ or of the church? The implied contrast with v. 14 suggests that [Paul] has the first of these in mind and is referring to individual believers. It cannot be denied that individual believers require to grow and mature in their faith ... however the main drive in our context is corporate, relating to the building up of the church (vv. 12, 16). But if the individualistic interpretation is preferred, the implication of [Paul’s] use of [the Greek word ‘anēr’] would then be that he was thinking only of male believers and 4.22-4 shows he is not. More importantly, if a contrast is being drawn with [plural Greek word for ‘infant, babe’] in v. 14, we ought to have the plural here. **The individualistic interpretation is then unsatisfactory; any other must lie in the area of corporate understanding.**” [Best, 401; see also Salmond, 332; Lincoln, 256; Thielman, 281f; O’Brien, 307; Muddiman, 203; Snodgrass, 205]

‘perfect, complete, mature’ — τέλειον [teleion] — BADG defines this as follows: **‘attaining an end or purpose, complete’**; (1) pertaining to meeting the highest stand (a) of things: *‘perfect’*; (b) of persons who are fully up to standard in a certain respect and not satisfied with half-way measures: *‘perfect, complete, expert,’* (2) pertaining to being mature: *‘full-grown, mature, adult.’* **Friberg’s Lexicon** defines it as *‘complete, perfect; (1) with its chief component as totality, as opposed to partial or limited; (2) with its chief component being full development as opposed to immaturity; (3) with its chief component being full preparation or readiness complete, perfect. In all its meanings it carries the component of a purpose that has been achieved.’* **Louw-Nida’s Lexicon** defines it as *‘pertaining to being perfect in the sense of not lacking any moral quality.’*

COULD PAUL BE REFERRING TO CHRIST? — “Could the ‘man’ be Christ? Schlier, *Christus*, 27-37, [Heinrich Schlier, 1900-1978, German theologian, author of *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrieff*] provides a considerable number of references to the use of the term ‘man’ for the heavenly saviour and in some of these we actually have the phrase, ‘perfect (mature) man’. Unfortunately most of the references are late and while the general idea may be early the actual occurrences of the phrase may be derived from Christian usage. **Yet it cannot be denied that the heavenly saviour is often seen as corporate; this also seems to be true of Christ in the Pauline literature; as the first Adam in a sense contains all humanity within himself so the second Adam contains all believers;** it may not then be necessary to depend here on later texts.... There is no easy solution to these difficulties and commentators offer both individualistic, referring to Christ, and corporate, referring to the church, solutions. **Even if no easy solution is possible a corporate accords better with the context,** and with very great hesitation we must accept this and view the ‘man’ as the corporate Christ (he is thus referred to in all three phrases) who is the church.” [Best, 401f]

WHILE NOT IGNORING WE MUST EACH GROW INDIVIDUALLY, PAUL'S EMPHASIS HERE IS UPON

CORPORATE MATURITY — faced with the difficulties above, many commentators relates this back to Paul's comment in 2:15:

'by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace' (Eph 2:15 ESV)

As discussed when we studied this verse, I believe Paul is making the reference to the unity of believers within the local assembly; before they were divided as Jews and Gentiles but now united in one body, metaphorically as *'one new man'*. ***"This destination to which all believers are headed is understood as a corporate entity: it is not described in individual terms, but refers to the totality of believers as the body of Christ (cf. v. 12), in an expression that is akin to 'the one new man' of 2:15."*** [O'Brien, 307] ***"Who then is the mature person that is set forth here? Some think this designation refers to individual believers. In fact, in the next verse it refers to individuals as 'infants.' However, the context as a whole talks about the body composed of individuals. Interestingly, Paul does not use the plural form: 'we attain to mature persons' but instead he uses the singular form with reference to the unity of the collective body of believers: 'we attain to a mature person.' This strongly indicates that the 'mature person' refers to the church, the corporate body of believers.*** This is analogous to 2:15 where Jews and Gentiles were created into one new person and brought into one body (2:16)... The singular form 'mature person' points to a body of believers, not to individual believers in the body since the context refers to all believers in the body of Christ. Accordingly, all believers are to do the work of the ministry for the goal of building up that body of Christ. This is to continue until 'we all' attain the goal of the unity of faith and of the knowledge of our Lord and until 'we all' attain the goal of the mature person. As the body matures unity results. In fact, a sign of immaturity is the disunity of the body. ***Often we tend to think of spiritual maturity as only individual growth in the Lord, but in this passage the emphasis is on the importance of body growth, resulting in unity. Inversely, immaturity is individual growth not shared with the body with the result that the body lacks maturity. This may render some of its members powerless against the enticements of cunning people (v 14). Again, as the individual in his or her spiritual growth contributes to the body, the body as a whole can grow.*** [Hoehner, 555f] "Here in Ephesians the focus has shifted onto the whole Church seen as unified entity. 'We all' are to move toward 'the mature person'.... The Church, which has already been depicted as one new person in Christ (2:15), is to attain to what in principle it already has in him — maturity and completeness." [Lincoln, 256] "The singular is used because it refers to the Church as a whole." [Abbott, 120; see also Salmond, 332; Thielman, 281f] *[It should be admitted most of the above quotes would be a reference to the family of God, what many would call the 'universal-invisible church', a grievous misnomer. I believe the context is better served by keeping Paul's comments to refer to the local assembly of believers.]*

'to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' — εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [eis metron hēlikias tou plērōmatos tou Christou] — Robinson: *'to the full measure of the complete stature, or maturity, of the fulfilled Christ.'* [139] This is a difficult phrase. Let us break this down into smaller chunks to help us understand Paul's point here.

'to the measure' — εἰς μέτρον [eis metron] — DAGB: *'that by which anything is measured, either an instrument for measuring or the result of that measuring.'* This therefore points to a definite standard by which to be compared; in this case, not Christ Himself but the *'stature of the fulness of Christ.'*

'of the stature' — ἡλικίας [hēlikias] — this familiar word has an ambiguity which sometimes makes it difficult to determine its exact meaning. Friberg's Lexicon: *stature, maturity = (1) the time of a person's life on earth: 'age, years, span of life', (2) a particular period of life, 'mature age, adulthood, maturity', (3) a dimension of the physical body, 'stature, size'. "[This word] when used of persons can refer either to age or body size, and its meaning must be determined from the context; the meaning is in fact often ambiguous (e.g. Mt 6.27; Lk 2.52; 12.25) since age (e.g. Jn 9.21, 23; Heb 11.11) and body size (e.g. Lk 19.3; Ezek 13.18) are related."* [Best, 402] It is this reason for the various readings in the gospels:

'Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?' (Mat 6:27 KJV)

'And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?' (Mat 6:27 ESV)

Since our word could refer to physical size or to age, was Christ referring to adding to our height or to our span of life? Either rendering makes sense but we can see how this ambiguity may cause difficulties. Look at how our difference versions render this verse:

'after the measure of age of the fulnes of Christ.' (Tyndale's NT)

'vnto the measure of the age of the fulnesse of Christ' (Geneva Bible)

'attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ' (NIV)

'to a measure of stature of the fulness of the Christ' (YLT)

'to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ' (NASV)

'to (unto) the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' (KJV, RV, RSV, ASV, NKJV, ESV)

As with our translations, most of the commentators I have studied slightly favor the emphasis upon size, stature: ***"Although the word rendered 'stature' can signify 'age', and in the light of the contrast between children and adults some have taken the term in this latter sense, the imagery of 'fulness' is more naturally suited to spatial categories so that 'stature' is more***

appropriate here.” [O’Brien, 307; see also Salmond, 332f; Thielman, 282; Muddiman, 204; others do however favor the understanding of ‘age, maturity’; e.g., Abbott, 120; Hoehner, 556f] “This stature grows just as it receives of Christ’s fulness; and when that fulness is wholly enjoyed, it will be that of a ‘perfect man.’ The idea conveyed by the figure cannot be misunderstood. The Christian ministry is appointed to labour for the perfection of the church of Christ, a perfection which is no romantic anticipation, but which consists of the communicated fulness of Christ.” [Eadie, 314]

‘of the fullness of Christ’ — τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [tou plērōmatos tou Christou] — This is a favorite word of Paul’s in the book of Ephesians; it is used 17x in the NT:

Used of an animal wineskin: ‘No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.’ (Matt 9:16 || Mark 2:21)

Used of a basket: ‘And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven.’ (Mark 8:20)

Used of the times of the Gentiles: ‘Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?’ For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.’ (Rom 11:12, 25)

Used to refer to the gospel: ‘And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.’ (Rom 15:29)

Used to refer to the Lord’s ownership of the entirety of this earth: ‘For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof... But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof’ (1 Cor 10:26, 28)

Used to refer to the prophetic time of Christ to be born: ‘But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law’ (Gal 4:4)

‘That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him’ (Eph 1:10)

The rest of its usages refers to Christ, mostly by the Apostle Paul:

‘And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.’ (John 1:16)

‘Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.’ (Eph 1:23)

‘And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.’ (Eph 3:19)

‘Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ’ (Eph 4:13)

‘For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell’ (Col 1:19)

‘For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.’ (Col 2:9)

“This is the fourth time [plērōma] occurs in Ephesians (1:10, 23; 3:19; 4:13). In every NT use it maintains the idea of the result of filling is fullness, completeness, entirety. It can be used actively, ‘that which fills,’ or passively. ‘that which is filled.’ In the present verse it is active, namely, Christ is the fullness of God and is actively filling the church.” [Hoehner, 557]
“The pleroma of Christ can either be that which fills him or that which he fills. In 1.23 he was seen as filled by God and as filling the church; since here we have no suggestion of what might fill him the phrase is better taken as denoting what he fills, and, as in 1.23, what he fills will be the church, and not ‘all things’ as in 4.10. 3.19 also spoke of believers being filled.” [Best, 402]

CONCLUSION – ‘THE STANDARD TO WHICH WE ARE TO ATTAIN’ — I am finding this very difficult to place in my own words but perhaps Paul’s emphasis here is this,

‘until we all, each together, arrive at or attain ... unto that standard of measurement, of the stature or maturity of the fullness of Christ, that perfection of God in Christ, until we all become Christ-like.’

“The maturity of this growth is measured by nothing less than Christ’s full stature. ‘The glorified Christ provides the standard at which his people are to aim: the corporate Christ cannot be content to fall short of the perfection of the personal Christ.’” [O’Brien, 308; quoting Bruce, 350f] **“The church is to become a perfect man, i.e., it is to attain the measure of the full maturity of Christ. In other words, it is to be completely conformed to him, perfect as he is perfect.”** [Hodge, 168; see also Hoehner, 556f; Lange, 152; Thielman, 282f] “The [plērōma, ‘fulness’] here is taken by some in the sense of perfection... [T]he phrase means **the fulness that belongs to Christ, the sum of the qualities which make Him what He is.** These are to be imaged in the Church (cf. i. 23), and when these are in us we shall have reached our maturity and attained to the goal set before us. Thus the whole idea will be this – ‘the measure of the age, or (better) the stature, that brings with it the full possession on our side of that which Christ has to impart – **the embodiment in us the members, of the graces and qualities which are in Him the**

Head’.” [Salmond, 333] **“God’s great desire for His church is that every believer, without exception, come to be like His Son (Rom. 8:29), manifesting the character qualities of the One who is the only measure of the full-grown, perfect, mature man.** The church in the world is Jesus Christ in the world, because the church is now the fullness of His incarnate Body in the world (cf. 1:23). We are to radiate and reflect Christ’s perfections. Christians are therefore called to ‘walk in the same manner as He walked’ (1 John 2:6; cf. Col. 4:12), and He walked in complete and continual fellowship with and obedience to His Father. To walk as our Lord walked flows from a life of prayer and of obedience to God’s Word. ‘We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:18). As we grow into deeper fellowship with Christ, the process of divine sanctification through His Holy Spirit changes us more and more into His image, from one level of glory to the next. The agent of spiritual maturity, as well as of every other aspect of godly living, is God’s own Spirit—apart from whom the sincerest prayer has no effectiveness (Rom. 8:26) and even God’s own Word has no power (John 14:26; 16:13-14; 1 John 2:20). It is obvious that believers, all of whom have unredeemed flesh (Rom. 7:14; 8:23), cannot in this life fully and perfectly attain the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. But they must and can reach a degree of maturity that pleases and glorifies the Lord. The goal of Paul’s ministry to believers was their maturity, as indicated by his labors to ‘present every man complete (teleios, mature) in Christ’ (Col. 1:28-29; cf. Phil. 3:14-15).” [MacArthur, 157f] **“When they shall all have come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, when they shall all have come to a full-grown Man; then in the ripe maturity of the New Man, ‘the fullness of the Christ’ will itself have been attained.”** [Robinson, 140]

WHEN DOES THIS HAPPEN? – PRESENT OR FUTURE? (THE ‘NOW / NOT YET’ TENSION) — “There is tension between 1.23 and our verse (and 3.19) in that in the former the filling is already a fact whereas here it is still future; ‘what in 1.23 was a statement of fact is now a standard of attainment’; this however is a tension normal to the letter.” [Best, 402]

Most of whom I have studied acknowledge the fulfilment of this goal is only attained perfectly at the return of Christ but are quick to acknowledge that does not decry the present emphasis:

“It is questioned whether St. Paul here conceives this ideal as one to be realised in the present life or only in the future. Amongst the ancients, Chrysostom, Theoph., Oecum., Jerome, took the former view, Theodoret the latter. *It would probably be an error to suppose that the apostle meant definitely either one or the other. He speaks of an ideal which may be approximated to. But though it may not be perfectly attainable it must be aimed at, and this supposes that its attainment is not to be represented as impossible.*” [Abbott, 121]

“[T]he potential that it could occur in the present time is real, otherwise, there would be no need for gifts to be given to each believer for the building up of the church. Furthermore, Christ’s death and the Holy Spirit’s power are sufficient to accomplish this end. Finally, the contents of verse 14, ‘in order that we might no longer be children, being tossed back and forth by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine,’ can hardly have reference to the eschatological consummation.” [Hoehner, 558]

“While the first part of verse 13 may have implications for the end times, this passage makes more sense if understood of an attainable, expected goal for Christians in the present. Otherwise the focus on Christian maturity in verses 14-16 makes no sense. Paul’s concern is that his readers will not be blown about like babies now, not after the parousia.” [Snodgrass, 205]

“Some commentators advocate the view that such an ultimate objective is only attainable at glorification, believing that Paul is describing our final heavenly unity and knowledge. But that idea does not fit the context at all, because the apostle is not describing the final work of Christ on behalf of the church in heaven but the work of gifted men in the church on earth. These results could only apply to the church in its earthly dimension.” [MacArthur, 156]

“The church is already the fullness of Christ (1:23; cf. 4:10). There is thus a realized dimension to its existence. But the future element is still present: the apostle has prayed that the readers might be ‘filled up to all the fullness of God’ (3:19); now in the immediate context the goal to be reached is mature manhood, and this is defined by the fullness of Christ.” [O’Brien, 307]

“It has been considered a question whether the Apostle is here referring solely to present, or to future life. The mention of πίστις [pistis, ‘faith’], and the tenor of ver. 14,15, incline us to the former view; still it is probable that no special distinction was intended.” [Ellicott, 97]

Paraphrase of Ephesians 4:1-16

¹ I call upon you to live in a manner worthy of someone who has been saved:

² with humility and gentleness,

with patience,

bearing with one another in love,

³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

⁴ One body,

one Spirit,

one hope of your calling,

⁵ one Lord,

one faith,

one baptism,

⁶ one God and Father of all.

⁷ However gifts of grace have been given to each one of us as it seemed fit for Christ to give;

⁸ as it says: 'Ascending on high he led captives captive and he gave gifts to men.' (Ps 68:18)

^{9,10} (Christ first descended from heaven so that He would be able to ascend to fill all things)

¹¹ And he himself gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be shepherds and teachers,

¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ

¹³ until we all arrive

into the unity of faith and knowledge of the son of God,

into a mature male,

into the measure of the stature of fullness of Christ,

¹⁴ in order that (hina) we may cease being infants,

those who are tossed back and forth by the waves, blown here and there by every wind of teaching planned by men;

¹⁵ rather speaking truth in love let us grow in every respect unto him who is the head, Christ,

¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and brought together, builds itself up in love.



I call upon you to live as someone who has been saved: with humility, gentleness, patience, love for one another and in unity; for we each have been saved and are united in our faith.

But while we have this union and are united, we are also each different at least in part due to the gifts given us by our risen Saviour and Master. He has the right to dispense these gifts as it pleases Him since He is the ascended Lord of all things.

So to we who differ according to the graces given to us by Christ, He gave gifted men to enable us both individually and corporately to mature in our faith. Then we would no longer follow every false teaching of men but would rather build ourselves up in love, growing as a body in every respect unto Him who is the Head.



¹¹ He gave men with a variety of ministries ¹² to equip believers to do the work of the ministry ¹³ until we each mature in the faith and our knowledge of Christ ¹⁴ in order that (hina) we be no longer infants that are easily led astray by false teachings ¹⁵ but will rather grow up in every way into Him Who is the Head, ¹⁶ from Whom the whole body makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.