

**13 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 Messiah.**

The opening word of this verse is, in the Greek (*μέχρι, mexri*), used here to identify the ultimate goal to which the *ekklesia* of Yeshua must strive. Moreover, that Paul defines our ultimate goal for which we are to strive as attaining to the “fullness of Messiah” means that this will be a life-long endeavor. Those who teach that the believer is to attain final sanctification in this life (also called “sinless perfectionism,”) so that the believer no longer sins, have twisted the Scriptures and are teaching a falsehood. As Calvin notes:

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....<sup>1</sup>

One question that arises is whether the opening phrase of our verse, “until we all attain” is grammatically to be attached to the opening verb of v. 11, “And He gave...,” or to the verbal noun *οικοδομήν, oikodomēn*, “building up” in v. 12. If the former is correct, then Paul is teaching us that “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” were given to the *ekklesia* with the goal of their service to be that “all would attain to the unity of the faith.”<sup>2</sup> If the latter interpretation is received, the meaning would be that “the building up of the body” resulting from the proper serving of the whole is that which results in all attaining “to the unity of the faith.”<sup>3</sup>

But there really is no need to think that Paul has one or the other of these options in mind, for the language of the text itself is a unity. The “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” are given to the body of Messiah in order to equip the believers to serve, and in being so equipped, they serve as God intends and this combined enterprise results in the building up of the body of Messiah with the goal of full unity in the faith so that each member of the *ekklesia* grows with the goal of becoming more and more like Yeshua.

We see the complete picture here. The role of the evangelist and pastor-teacher is to teach the truths of the Scriptures given by the apostles

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 552.

<sup>3</sup> See Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 281.

and prophets, and it is upon the foundation and personal application of God's word that the believers are equipped to fulfill their service within the body of Messiah, a service which enables all to become more and more like Yeshua. The picture Paul has given us is that of a community working together for the good of each individual and thus for the good of the whole. The success of the *ekklesia* ultimately depends upon the work of God Himself, but His method to assure that each believer in the body grows to full maturity is through each one serving others as they have been spiritually equipped to do.

...until we all attain – The Greek word here translated as “attain” is *καταντάω* (*katantaō*). Its basic sense is “to arrive at a given destination,” and metaphorically, “to reach a condition or goal.”<sup>1</sup> The inclusive language, “we all,” emphasizes the unity which Paul has already emphasized in v. 3, “being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Such unity is exemplified in the fact that (vs. 4–6) there is “one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” Since there is a singularity in the focus of all who are believers, it is clear that none are left out of God's purpose to bring all to full maturity in Yeshua. Indeed, since all who are believers are “in Messiah,” the unity of believers within the body of Messiah flows from each one's union with Messiah in His death, resurrection, and life.

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.<sup>2</sup>

While the process of spiritual maturity may involve different life experiences for each individual believer, it is clear that our Messiah expects all to reach a full level of maturity. The obvious characteristic of life in general is that it is marked by growth. It is incongruous, then, for a person to claim to be a child of God through faith in Yeshua but who shows no desire to mature in his or her faith. The term “carnal Christian” is clearly an oxymoron.

to the unity of the faith – Paul uses this same word “unity” (*ἐνότης*, *henotēs*) in 4:3 where he admonishes us to “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace.” The Ruach HaKodesh is the One Who works within every believer, not only to bring that person to faith, but

1 BDAG, “καταντάω,” p. 523.

2 Thielmann, *Ephesians*, p. 281.

also to indwell the believer in order to enable him or her in the ongoing process of sanctification through application of the scriptures.

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2Thess 2:13)

In our text, unity is attached to “the faith,” meaning the body of truth by which saving faith is revealed, defined, and taught in the Scriptures. As in v. 4, the term “the faith” (τῆς πίστεως, *tēs pisteōs*) is used here to mean the objective truth to which all believers give full assent, that is, the truth as revealed in the Scriptures that forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation has been secured through the redemptive work of Yeshua and such salvation is attainable only by faith in Him. So in our verse, “the faith” refers to the content of what we believe. Once again, we see the Apostle emphasizing that the very bedrock upon which our redemption rests is the truth revealed to us in the eternal and unchanging word of God.

...and of the knowledge of the Son of God – Here the term “the faith,” i.e., the objective truth that defines our saving relationship with God, is specifically identified as the “knowledge of the Son of God.” We should first note that the word translated “knowledge” is the compound Greek word ἐπίγνωσις (*epignōsis*) which seems to indicate “knowledge directed toward a particular object.”<sup>1</sup> Paul teaches us here that the object of this knowledge is “the Son of God” (τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ)<sup>2</sup> and that the goal of the believer is to grow in his or her knowledge of Yeshua.

Once again Paul is emphasizing that the unity of the faith is obtainable only when believers within their community strive to know the truth about Yeshua and His saving work, and affirm such truth together. True unity is not found in discarding boundaries and absolutes so that everyone can “just get along.” True unity within the body of Messiah flows from a willingness to submit to the truth as it has been given to us by God in His word, and to grow in understanding how living in accordance with the truth is to become more and more like the One from Whom the truth is revealed, even the Son of God.

The confession of *Sola Scriptura*, that the Scriptures are our final au-

1 Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 553.

2 The context demands that τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ be understood as an objective genitive.

thority in obtaining “the knowledge of the Son of God,” is therefore foundational to all who seek to know Yeshua in truth and to become more and more conformed to His life of righteousness.

...to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. – The goal in growing in “the knowledge of the Son of God” is not an intellectual exercise to prove one’s intelligence but is rather to know Him in order to become like Him. This is what Paul defines as spiritual maturity, and it requires humility, for to become more and more like Yeshua means to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to live in accordance with the leading and urgings of the Spirit, as Paul teaches in Romans.

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Rom 8:13)

The interesting thing in this verse is that Paul uses the Greek word *ἀνὴρ* (*anēr*) in the phrase “to a mature man.” The Greek word *anēr* is gender specific, meaning a “male” person. If Paul had intended to apply the phrase “to a mature man” to individuals within the body of Messiah, he would have used the Greek word *ἄνθρωπος* (*anthrōpos*) which carries the sense of “human kind.”

In the context of our verse, Paul is using the metaphor of a “mature person” as a picture of the *ekklesia* in which individual believers begin their journey of faith as infants (the contrasting term he uses in the next verse) but who must grow to become mature in the Lord. But what is the standard by which such maturity of the body is measured? It is, once again, the very person of Yeshua Himself.

Further, that Paul is using the height of an adult as contrasted with that of infants is clear when he speaks of the “stature” of Messiah, for this Greek word *ἡλικία* (*hēlikia*) carries the sense of “height” so that Paul is using “height” to picture “maturity,” that is, as compared to infants.

The Greek word translated “mature” in our verse is *τέλειος* (*teleios*) and it may be that Paul has in mind the Torah commandment in Deut 18:13, “You shall be blameless before ADONAI your God,” where the LXX translates the Hebrew word *תָּמִים*, *tāmim*, “blameless” with the same word, *τέλειος* (*teleios*). Interestingly, this same word *teleios* is used when Yeshua teaches the disciples, “Be perfect (*τέλειοι*, *teleioi*), therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (*τέλειός*, *teleios*) (Matt 5:48).

...which belongs to the fullness of Messiah. – The goal for every believer is to be like Messiah, and thus to grow in spiritual maturity to be able

to reflect the very mind and heart of the Messiah. When applied to the *ekklesia*, Paul wants us to view the community of faith as growing to express the very person of Messiah, that is, as eventually attaining Messiah's full height.

**14–15 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Messiah,**

Having clearly given the path that those who form the *ekklesia* must take, i.e., maturing in the faith and growing in spiritual strength in order to show forth the very glories of Yeshua, he shows how important such growth is in order for the *ekklesia* not to remain immature and thus ineffective for the very mission to which we have been called. The Greek makes this clear by the initial *ἵνα* (*hina*) which the NASB translates "As a result."

Here we see that though the maturity of the body of Messiah is to be encouraged by those leaders God has given to the assembly, an obligation for each individual in the body is likewise evident. For Paul addresses all within the community when he writes "we are no longer to be children." Each individual believer is to grow in his or her faith so as to gain maturity in living out the ways of the Lord and no longer living as spiritual infants and each one is to help the other in this path of becoming mature in the faith.

Now that Paul has described what the *ekklesia* should be, he goes on to contrast this positive picture with the negative aspects which result from spiritual immaturity. The use of "children" (*νήπιος*, *nēpios*) is in stark contrast to the "mature man" in the previous verse and offers the characteristics of naivety and ignorance. Since the "unity of the faith" and obtaining "the knowledge of the Son of God" requires being able to discern between what is true and what is false, if the *ekklesia* is to mature as God intends, those given to the *ekklesia* whose duty it is to teach the truth must do their work carefully and well, and the community must be ready to receive their teaching and grow in the knowledge and application of the truth in all aspects of life. As Klein put it:

Infants cannot be unified; they are individualistic to a fault. It would be sad indeed if the church never grew beyond infancy. A spiritually infantile church will be prone to instability