

## Community and the Growth of Christ's Kingdom

Ephesians 4:7-16 (in light of Psalm 68)

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I want to do something different this morning. I want to preach on two passages. I want to show the logic of Paul's argument by showing how he was basing it upon the Psalm that he quotes. Paul bases his whole discussion in verses 7-16 on Psalm 68, a wonderful Psalm of the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. And in that Psalm God places Christ as the Commander-in-chief of an army – a Commander-in-Chief who converts the rebellious, gives gifts to those captives, equips them, loads them with benefits, commands them to be loyal, sets commanders over the army, and directs His army's movements. Paul draws each of those points out in this passage. He was one of the rebellious ones who was converted and taken captive to Christ, so in verse 1 he calls himself **the prisoner of the Lord** and in verse 8 He quotes a verse on our captivity to Christ. He **took captivity captive**. He calls for our loyalty in verse 1 "**walk worthy of the calling with which you were called**" and fleshes that out throughout the chapter.

### I. Captives with a Kingdom Vision

Let's look first at how it is not just Paul who is a prisoner of the Lord. We all are. Let me read verses 7-8. **But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.** [And notice the logical connection between verses 7 and 8] **Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men."** He's quoting from Psalm 68 and that Psalm tells us why Christ had to take us captive. The next phrase in Psalm 68 says, **even among the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell there.** And that is my desire – that even though we were rebellious, that the Lord would dwell in our midst. The whole Psalm is about rebels being conquered by God's grace. And once they are conquered by grace they are weaned from their rebellious ways. Paul's point in quoting this verse is that God didn't give us His grace and give us His spiritual gifts to squander on ourselves. He has rescued us from the captivity of Satan so that we can serve a new Master. And this Master is a kind master who dwells with us and blesses us. And he will amplify on that in verses 17-31.

I don't have time to show all the ways in which Paul beautifully draws out the implications of the whole Psalm here, but in the next two verses he gives three reasons as to why Christ has the right to demand that our wills be in total captivity to Him. Verse 9 says he has the right because he suffered

and died for us. He paid a great price for us and deserves that we be decent servants. **Now this, “He ascended” - what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?** In a previous sermon in Acts I showed how this refers to Christ’s descent into Hades.

A second thing that gives Christ the right to demand your total service is that He ascended to His throne as Lord. He is presently King of His army. And as the King of the army, He deserves to be served faithfully and without any reservation. Soldiers don’t question their commanding officers. They say “Yes Sir.” And Psalm 68 portrays this King leading His army from heaven. Paul says simply, **He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens...** The One who is on your side is a King who is above every other king. He is exalted above anything that is imaginable. To fail to serve Him is unimaginable.

The third reason given is that the purpose of Christ’s suffering and exaltation was so that He could either “fill all things,” or as some translate it, “fulfill all things.” The majority of times in the Bible it is translated as fulfill.

But just for the sake of argument, let’s assume it means “fill.” What are our options as far as interpretation? William Hendriksen points out that it can’t mean that Jesus fills the universe with His omnipresence, because He never ceased to be omnipresent. Even while He was here on earth, He said in John 3:13 that He not only descended from heaven (so He is talking about His divinity there), but continued to be in heaven. He was omnipresent. In fact, if He failed to be omnipresent, He would have ceased to be God. And whatever verse 10 means, it certainly means that it began to happen at His ascension. **...who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.** So put out of your mind that this is talking about divine omnipresence. Of course He is omnipresent, but that is not what this verse says began to happen at the death, resurrection and ascension.

Some Lutherans have recognized that problem, but they have insisted that there was something new that happened. They say that Christ’s *flesh* became omnipresent from this point on. His humanity became omnipresent, and that is why they think we can eat His flesh and drink His literal blood. His flesh and blood are in, under and with the sacraments according to them – because they are omnipresent. But if they want to use this text to prove that doctrine, it actually proves too much because this text doesn’t just say that Jesus fills the sacrament all over the world, but that He begins to fill all things. He would be just as present in the grass, the clouds and the trees. And of course, they don’t want to say that. They want to say that there is a special presence of His body in the sacrament. A second problem is that the

New Testament repeatedly makes Christ's body *not* here, but in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father. Acts 3:21 says that heaven must receive Him till all things are restored. The angels in Acts 1 say that Jesus is coming back, which implies that He is not here. If His body was omnipresent, there would be no need for a Second Coming. The third problem is that this would make Christ's humanity almost disappear into His deity, and orthodoxy has always said He continues to remain fully God and fully man. So Hendriksen rejects that view as well. He says, it can't mean that He *becomes* omnipresent as to His deity, and it can't mean that He becomes omnipresent as to His humanity.

Hendriksen's view is that this must be talking about Christ beginning to fill all the universe with His grace, His blessings and His transformation – which is the immediate context. That is certainly the truth expressed elsewhere, and it is certainly a possible interpretation. And it would fairly closely parallel my interpretation. So we will hold that one as a possible interpretation.

But I agree with those interpreters who say that the Greek word should just have its usual translation of “fulfill – “to fulfill all things.” In which case Christ either begins to fulfill all prophecy (as I take it),<sup>1</sup> or He begins to fulfill all the tasks that God has assigned to Him as Lord and King (as others take it).

But really, all three of those last interpretations are so close, that they are just slightly different shades of meaning. All of the last three interpretations indicate that Christ's death, resurrection and ascension is *the* turning point of history. We don't have to wait for the Second Coming for Christ to fulfill all prophecy. Or (if you take the other two interpretations) you don't have to wait till the Second Coming for Christ to begin making His redemptive changes throughout the universe. In fact, the New Testament affirms that every prophecy will be fulfilled by the time of the Second Coming, and every enemy will be subdued beneath His feet – the last enemy (death) being conquered at the time of the Second Coming. So this is actually a pretty interesting verse for eschatology.

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<sup>1</sup> “Perhaps it is better to take the other common sense of the Greek word *pleroo* (“fill”), which is to “fulfill” or “bring to completion.”” (IVP, Hard Sayings, Walter Kaiser, et al). See also Wescott, Marrius Victorinus, Anselm, Herman Bavinck, the Geneva Bible, Tyndale, Bishops, Marius Victorinus. Wescott's view is similar but slightly different: “*That He might by His presence bring all things to their completeness, give reality to all that the universe of created things presented in sign and promise. Christ first ‘fulfils’ all things and then receives them to Himself when brought to their true end.*”

Christ started the gradual process of fulfilling all the glorious kingdom promises at His ascension. Acts 3:21 says, **whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.** But here's the important point that Paul will draw out - Psalm 68 points out that before those prophecies are fulfilled - before "all things are fulfilled", the church has got to get its act together. God's people must submit themselves entirely to their king's service. Why? Because the Head doesn't work apart from His body. A few verses later Psalm 68 says, **Your God has commanded your strength.** He's asking for volunteers. Which of you wouldn't jump at the chance to do something for Jesus if He was here on earth and commanding you to do something for Him for the day? Even if it meant losing your job, you would do it. Boy, what an opportunity! Well, Paul (based on Psalm 68) says that God is calling for volunteers. And these are army volunteers. Using your gifts is not an option. But He still calls upon us to delight in doing it - to be volunteers. I love the way Psalm 110 words it - **Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power.** Well, that's exactly what Psalm 68 says, **Your God has commanded your strength;** [and then there's this prayer] **Strengthen O God, what you have done for us.** What amazing words! God enables us to do what He commands us to do. Earlier the Psalm said, **O God, when You went out before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness... You O God, provided from Your goodness for the poor. The LORD gave the word; great was the company of those who proclaimed it; Kings of armies flee...** So yes, God's power provides everything, but He does it through volunteers who lay their lives down and follow the King into battle. They are captives to His will. They gladly proclaim His Word.

There aren't too many in Satan's army fleeing today because there aren't too many committed Christians to take the charge. There aren't volunteers. There aren't too many Christians who take seriously this phrase: **Your God has commanded your strength.**

Let me read you a few quotes from a former high-ranking leader in the British Communist Party who later became a Christian. Douglas Hyde said,

The Communists make far bigger demands upon their people than the average Christian organization would ever dare to make.

[Let me stop there for a moment and say that it's not just the Communists who inspire dedication and leadership (which was the name of his book). Coaches of football teams make far bigger demands upon children and

parents than the average Christian organization would ever dare to make. But his experience was with communism. So let me keep reading.]

The Communists make far bigger demands upon their people than the average Christian organization would ever dare to make. As I have already noted, they believe that if you make big demands upon people you will get a big response. So this is made a deliberate policy on their part. They never make the small demand if they can make the big one. Contrary to what is often believed by those who have never been Communists, they do not, at any rate in non-Communist countries, normally achieve this by putting a gun, either real or metaphorical, at the member's head. This would not achieve its purpose. Dedication and willingness to sacrifice must be developed within a person, then drawn out of them, not forced in. (p. 27)

Like attracts like. Those who are attracted by the dedication they see within the movement will themselves be possessed of a latent idealism, a capacity for dedication. Thus dedication perpetuates itself. It sets the tone and pace of the movement as a whole. This being so, the movement can make big demands upon its followers, knowing that the response will come. If the majority of members of an organization are half-hearted and largely inactive, then it is not surprising if others who join it soon conform to the general pattern. If the organization makes relatively few demands upon its members and if they quite obviously feel under no obligation to give a very great deal to it, then those who join may be forgiven for supposing that this is the norm and that this is what membership entails.

If, on the other hand, the majority of members, from the leaders down, are characterized by their single-minded devotion to the cause, if it is quite clear that the majority are giving until it hurts, putting their time, money, thought and if necessary life itself at its disposal, then those who consider joining will assume that this is what will be expected of them. If they nonetheless make the decision to join, they will come already conditioned to sacrifice till it hurts.

It is ludicrous to suppose that half-hearted Christians can conduct a fruitful dialogue with fully dedicated Communists.

Individual members of the Communist Party are brought to believe that together they and others like them can change the world. In their

lifetime. They are convinced that this is not just a dream...When you have succeeded in making men believe that change is necessary and possible and that they are the ones who can achieve it; when you have convinced them that they and the small minority of whom they are a part can transform the world in their lifetime, you have achieved something very considerable indeed. You have put into their lives a dynamic force so powerful that you can bring them to do what would otherwise be impossible. The dull and humdrum becomes meaningful. Life becomes purposeful and immensely more worth living.

To the Christian there is an element of sheer tragedy in this - that people with such potentialities should give so much energy, zeal and dedication to such a cause, while those who believe that they have the best cause on earth often give so little to it. And their leaders are so often afraid to ask for more than the merest minimum.

Now there is a huge mistake that churches could make at this point. They could assume that the church is the programs and ministries that are on the annual report and that people need to sacrifice more to make these programs go. But I don't see many programs in the New Testament. Who is the church? It's you the people. This means that when Lee is writing to the best of his ability, he is laying at least part of His gifts upon the altar. Now God may desire him to use more energies, as he has recently been doing by teaching others to write. But what he does seven days a week he is doing for the Lord. When Steve is organizing people to talk to Senators, City Council Men about the so-called "bullying law" or "education issues," He is heeding the Commander's prompting to be part of the great company who proclaims the Word and advances the Kingdom. And my goal is not to get you working 24 hours a day for me, but to get you living 24 hours a day for Christ. And the church organization's role is to use body life to encourage each other, exhort each other, network with each other and help each other with resources. I want you to have a vision of community that doesn't pull you away from your callings, but which inspires you and resources you to use everything you have to advance Christ's Kingdom.

The book was a wake up call to Christians to take up their cross and follow Christ - to give themselves wholly to the cause of Christ. We have a Word that is powerful; we have the promises of a God who cannot lie that He will put every enemy under Christ's feet and advance the cause of the church to such a degree that the church is battering down the very gates of

hell. **I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.** But Christ uses you and me in His army to conquer the world. Is your vision of Christianity's greatness greater than the Communist's vision of communism? It should be.

## II. Leaders with a Kingdom Vision.

The book I read from is called *Dedication and Leadership*. We've talked about dedication, but Paul moves on to leadership. **And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.** I think I have already dealt adequately with the nature of these gifts in a past sermon. But for now I just want to point out a simple truth: If the officers of the church restrict themselves to paper shuffling, administration, budget and the like, the saints will never be equipped to do the work of the ministry. In fact, if they see the primary task of the officers to recruit people to build church programs, they will not equip people to do what Psalm 68 calls for. The primary reasons officers were given to the church was to *equip* you to take over the world. This means that there should be a desire on your part to be equipped. That's where both the community and especially the leadership comes in. Verse 12 says, **for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.**

Dedication is not enough. There must also be effective leadership. Nor is leadership enough. Both go hand in hand. Psalm 68 used Old Covenant language: **There is little Benjamin, their leader, the princes of Judah and their company, the princes of Zebulon and the princes of Naphtali. Your God has commanded your strength. Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.**

And Paul in a similar way goes on to show how the church is strengthened over time for the huge task that is before us.

## III. Five Characteristics of People with a Kingdom Vision

### A. They recognize the important issues (vv. 7,8,11,16)

So we have dedication, and we have leadership, but what does the army look like? What would a strengthened and victorious people look like? I think there are five words that describe the kind of community that would turn the world upside down.

The first word is "Recognize." Paul is looking for a people who recognize first of all, what He has done for them. Verse 7 says, **But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

Now you may feel like you have nothing to contribute to solve the enormous problems that are in the world, but you need to recognize that God has given you grace and spiritual gifts that are perfectly suited for both the building up of the body and for the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world.

Paul also wanted a people who would recognize the greatness of Christ and His purposes. It may look like everything is topsy-turvy, but verses 8-10 indicates that Christ is in total control. And when we recognize Christ's hand of discipline (when we are not doing what we should be doing) and His hand of blessing in life, we begin to have the faith needed to be conquerors. Daniel 11 describes a very discouraging time in history when it looked like the world had totally triumphed and the church had totally caved in. But in verse 32 Daniel says, **With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.** What an awesome promise to those who recognize the greatness of their God.

Paul wants people to recognize their place in the church. There are some who are called to be leaders, and there are others who are called to be foot soldiers. We need to recognize the distinctions He has set in the body. And we need to recognize that absolutely every person in the body is important. Look at verse 16. Verse 16 indicates that each member is important: **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.** Now I used to think of this only in terms of the local church. But over time I have come to recognize that Christ has only one body. This is a body that exists all over the world. And that recognition has huge implications. It means that though every part is for the benefit of the body, it is not for the benefit of Dominion Covenant Church or any other local church. Let me illustrate what I am talking about. I listened to very inspiring talks by three NICHE Homeschool leaders. They are just ordinary parents who are making a difference. One of the talks was on the history of homeschooling in Iowa, and especially focusing on the conflict in the 70's through early 90's. And what struck me as I was listening was the impact that ordinary mom's and dad's had on reversing the tyranny of Goliath. It was very similar to what happened here in Nebraska. It wasn't a majority. Most of the people involved weren't even particularly gifted people. It was ordinary people who began to recognize that though they were weak, they couldn't hide in their homes any longer and say nothing. They were needed by the homeschoolers across the state. And people began to come together to support those who were being taken to court. That was the body working. They began to realize

that they had to do something as a body in obedience to the Head. They started making friends with government officials. They started lobbying. They did what they could. And God worked a miracle as His people started taking their responsibilities seriously. The same thing happened in Nebraska when the body came together to support what was happening in Louisville. I will have to admit that (to the shame of many American churches) most Christians either ignored what was happening or actively opposed what was happening in Louisville. But because at least some of the body was coming together, Christ prospered their work.

Anyway, Friday night after the meeting there was a man who approached Steve about the Legislative coffee. And he admitted that he had been laying low out of fear. He didn't want his name to go in front of a legislator. And he was beginning to recognize that he needed to get out and do something. If every Christian would do their part in the whole kingdom, rather than simply filling jobs within the church as an organization, our nation would be a different nation. But because people have interpreted the body as a local congregation, they pour all of their efforts into the organization and neglect the body. Am I making it clear? Rushdoony used to point out that the church is broader than what we think of as the local church. It is God's people living by Christ's grace 24 hours a day all over the world. And it is to the body as a whole that we need to think about our contribution. When there is a part of the body that is being taken to court over homeschooling, we need to be strategizing on how to advance God's cause there. The church did this over and over again in the first few centuries. We can write letters to support homeschooling in Germany. I don't know if you are aware of it, but the state is taking children away from parents over the issue of homeschooling. They will not tolerate what they call "a parallel culture" in Germany. It might make a difference if every part of the body rally's to their support. In fact, it would be great if someone started a PAL night in our church where we could have Prayers and Letters. Letters could be written strategically to businesses and to key public officials on the issues facing our culture. When there is a particularly good Christian candidate that is running for office, the body needs to ask Christ how we can best minister. If the candidate is a Christian but not fit for office, it might mean that we call for him to step down and learn worldview first. So we need to recognize that every one of us has gifts and abilities and has been strategically placed by the Lord to have opportunities for the broader kingdom.

We need to recognize the opportunities for ministry that the Lord places before us. Analyze what God is doing and how you can have a hand

in His exciting purposes. Recognize. Be flexible and creative. Ask yourself, “How could I better use my home for Christ’s kingdom? How could I better use hobby?” And our ministry may need to change as the situations change. So don’t get stuck in a rut. In my early life there were so many opportunities that I just didn’t recognize as opportunities because I was too focused upon what I thought needed to be done rather than asking God to open my eyes to opportunities.

Paul wanted a people who could recognize the difference between truth and error in verses 13-14. The church is in the mess it is in today because it simply does not know how to recognize such things. We need to ask God to (as Ephesians 1 says) open the eyes of our understanding so that we can see His mighty power at work in us and at work all around us and so that we can recognize the part that we can play. Isaiah says, **I am the Lord who teaches you to profit.** If you want to profit, you must constantly look to Him for wisdom to recognize. Ask Him to teach you to profit.

B. They trust (vv. 8-10)

The second word is “Trust.” It takes trust and faith to believe the stuff that Paul has been saying in these first four chapters. I believe that part of Paul’s point in quoting Psalm 68 in verses 8-10 is that we don’t labor in the *hopes* that we will gain the victory. The battle has already been won and we are praying and laboring from a *stance* of victory. There is a huge difference between those two outlooks on life. The first stance begs God, but keeps extra cards under the table because it assumes God won’t come through. The second stance thanks God for the victory. That’s a prayer of trust. When you confront demons, you need to know that their defeat has already been achieved in Christ. You don’t argue with demons. You command them with the authority that you have as being seated in the heavenlies with Christ (chapter 2:6). When you find a brother or sister in bondage to sin, you don’t give up on them. Christ has already purchased them out of captivity from Satan and into captivity to His will. It says, **He led captivity captive...** Christ has already broken our captivity to Satan. So when you see a person in bondage, don’t despair. Satan can only have what that person lets him have, and if you come with confidence, it will be infectious. Minister to him out of the stance of victory laying claim to what is already his, and helping him to lay claim to what is already his.

Look at what Paul has already told us in chapter 1:3: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.** It’s in the bank. We merely claim it by writing a check in Jesus name. Look at the authority that

God has already given to us. Chapter 2:6 says, **and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...** Those are all statements requiring faith. It says that His victory has given Him the legal basis for filling all things with His kingdom, or as the word in verse 10 is usually translated, of fulfilling all things. Either way it amounts to the same thing. The first interpretation prays with confidence, “Thy kingdom come”; the second interpretation prays, “Thy will be done – Thy prophecies be fulfilled.” But it amounts to the same thing. Christ’s ascension was the beginning of the fulfilling of all things that the prophets had foretold. Christ wants our assemblies to be assemblies of hope and faith.

C. They submit (vv. 8,11)

The third word is “Submit.” And this is a big one. Verse 8 indicates that we have been taken captive to Christ. A captive doesn’t call the shots, does he? You were not placed on earth to selfishly pursue your own interests. The home that you have, the job, the spouse, the children – all are a stewardship trust. That’s why Christ says “You can’t be my disciple unless you give up all and follow me.” Now the neat thing about that (that we won’t get into this morning) is that when we give them up, He gives the same things back to us 10-0fold. Like Isaiah said, **I am the Lord who teaches you to profit.** God is for you. He wants you to profit in this submission. But you are captive to Christ and all that you are and own really belongs to Him. Continually ask yourself, “What would Christ want me to use this or that for? How can I more effectively serve Christ?” Bring your sleep, your playtime, your family time, your community time into submission to His will. Christ claims everything, so that means that you can’t ignore any command of Scripture. It doesn’t matter how silly the command may seem to be, He calls you to submit.

Now most people would claim that they submit to Christ. But just as Scripture indicates that you can’t claim to love Christ if you don’t love the brethren, you can’t claim to be submitting to Christ if you are not submitting to the human authorities He has placed in your life. Christ gives visible representatives of His authority to test our submission. Let’s start with the last one in chapter 6:1. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord...** Parents represent the Lord to their children in the portion of His kingdom that is called family. We show submission to the Lord by showing submission to our parents when we are children. Look at chapter 5:22 for the second visible representative of the Lord: the husband. **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.** Your lack of submission to your husbands is lack of submission to the Lord. Scripture calls upon us to submit to civil government in the Lord. Men, when you fail to submit to

civil government (which is God's minister; God's representative upon this earth), you model to your wives and children that it is OK to rebel. Scripture calls us to submit to and obey the elders of the churches. Now, when any of those authorities overstep their authority and you submit to this unauthorized authority, you are implicated in the rebellion against God. So even that can be an integrity check. It must be a submission in the Lord.

*But* when there is a submission to human authority that is godly, there is a spiritual power that we gain. Why? Because God resists the proud, *but* gives grace to the humble. And it says in another place in James, **he gives more grace.**

D. They serve (vv. 12,16)

So we must recognize, trust, submit. Fourthly, we must serve. Verse 12 says, **for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry...** The word "ministry" simply means service. And there is no "the" in front of service in the Greek. Service is broader than church work. And this verse is one of many that calls all God's people servants. Now ultimately we serve Christ, but notice that verse 12 says that we serve Him by serving each other in the body: **for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying** [that means "building up"] **of the body of Christ...** Verse 16 says, **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.** Think of what a difference it would make in America if every part of the body would think of how they could serve the body at large. We have too much passivism amongst Christians, and we must call it for what it is – disobedience to Christ's command to serve the body. If you have a servant's heart you are going to find all kinds of things that you can do.

E. They anticipate (vv. 12-16)

Lastly, we must anticipate. There is coming a time when wimped out Christianity will give place to full orbbed Christianity, and when that happens it will be wonderful if you can honestly say that you were a part of that process. Look at how full orbbed this plan of Christ is. Verse 13 says, **till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...** That is an incredible promise. God is saying that the church at some point in history will grow so much that heresy will be gone, there will be a united statement of faith that all churches can make, there will be a full knowledge of God, a mature Christianity. And isn't that what the prophets foretold? They foretold a time when we would all see eye to eye and all speak the same thing (Is. 52:8). They foretold the time when the world will be filled

with the knowledge of the glory of God so pervasively that he likened this to waters covering the ocean beds (Hab. 2:14). That is an awesome vision to be striving for. It predicts that of the increase of Christ's government and peace there would be no end (Isaiah 9). That the church would batter down the gates of hell (Matt 16:18), that all nations and all kings would serve the Lord (Psalm 72). This is the goal of community – that Christ would be lifted up.

If those five words would characterize our church, there is much that could be accomplished. In fact, I believe that demons would tremble before a church that was characterized by those words.

#### IV. Christ's Long Term Goals In Giving Foot Soldiers & Officers (vs. 13-16)

##### A. Full Unity In Christ (v. 13; cf. 1:10; Col. 1:16,20)

##### 1. A unity that takes a process of time (“until we all come”)

Let's end by quickly looking at Christ's long term goals for the church. I've already read verse 13, but the first phrase, **till we all come...**, implies a process of time. They haven't arrived yet.

##### 2. A unity based on “faith”

The next phrase implies that this unity cannot be short-circuited the way many ecumenical movements are trying to do. You don't make unity at the expense of the truth. Paul defines the unity that he is interested in – **the unity of the faith...** Don't set your sights lower.

##### 3. A unity based on “knowledge”

The next phrase further defines this unity by indicating that it is unity based on knowledge. No dumbed down, touchy feely, group hug Christianity that neglects knowledge.

##### 4. A unity based on maturity (“mature man”)

The next phrase indicates that it is a unity based on maturity – **to a perfect man** [or as it can be translated, “to a mature man”], **to the measure of the stature** [there is another growth term] **of the fullness of Christ**. Every one of these phrases knocks down the counterfeit unities that are vying for our attention.

##### 5. A process that will not be finished until the church conforms to the measure of Christ (i.e., at the end of history)

Now we have to admit that this is a pretty radical vision. And some people think, “Surely that is hyperbole or exaggeration. Surely it can't be.” That's why I said that the word “faith” is going to have characterize our church. But when you have faith to believe the eschatological promises of

Scripture, it will give you an incredible vision that will drive you far more than the false promises drove the communists.

B. Leaving Behind The Immaturity Of The Church (v. 14)

1. Paul implied that the church had a long way to go (“that we should no longer be children”)

But Paul goes on and adds phrase to phrase to give us a sense of honor and satisfaction about the cause we are working for. In verse 14 He casts aside the weak, miserable efforts of modern unity. Again, he implies it won't happen overnight when he says, “**that we should not longer be children.**” That is an image of growth and need for maturing. It calls for patience. Children don't grow up overnight.

2. unstable (“tossed to and fro”)

But every one of us can hasten the time when the church is no longer unstable (or what Paul calls being **tossed to and fro**), if we ourselves get planted deeply so that we aren't tossed to and fro. But that also implies you are studying doctrine. Let me share a well-kept secret: systematic theologies were meant to be read, not stored on a shelf!

3. doctrinally diverse (“every wind of doctrine”)

We must leave behind every wind of unstable doctrine so that we can be in a better place to instruct others in the body to leave behind every strange wind and doctrine. That means buying books carefully rather than buying whatever Parables serves up on their store shelves. 90% of the books out there are worthless books. Go back to the old paths. Read the Reformers and the Puritans. There are some good modern authors, but you have to be so selective.

4. tricked and deceived by men (“trickery...deceive”)

But so many people have been taken in by the garbage. I know its easy to get cynical when we live in an era that is described more by verse 14 than it is by verse 13. But our Commander in Chief calls us in verses 15-16 to press on towards maturity and do all that we can to encourage the rest of the body to do the same. And keep in mind – we are talking about the whole body, not just Dominion Covenant Church. And this pressing forward involves speaking the truth in love to the whole body. It's not loving to ignore the truth when the body is walking with blindfolds toward a cliff. **Speaking the truth in love.** After all, it's not your being liked that is important. It's the body's conformity to Christ, the Head, that is important. And every one of us has a glorious part to play in this Reformation of the church.

C. Pressing Towards Full Maturity (vs. 15-16)

1. Paul implied a process over time (but...grow up...growth of the body")
2. Involves "truth"
3. Involves "love"
4. Involves dependence upon Christ for everything we do ("may grow up in all things into Him")
5. Involves submission to His authority in everything we do ("may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ")
6. Involves a spiritual union achieved by grace ("from whom the whole body joined and knit together")
7. Involves every Christian doing his part ("by what every joint supplies...every part does its share")
8. Involves effective use of our gifts ("the effective working by which every part does its share")
9. Involves mutual edification of each part ("for the edifying of itself in love")

This is His goal for history. Verse 16 goes on by pointing to a spiritual union achieved by grace ("**from whom the whole body joined and knit together**"). It also involves every Christian doing His part ("**by what every joint supplies...every part does its share**"). It involves an effective, rather than a haphazard use of gifts ("**the effective working by which every part does its share**"). It involves finally mutual edification in love. ("for the edifying of itself in love.") I don't know about you, but I am excited about this kingdom vision. I think it is a vision worthy fighting for and worth dying for. And I would urge you to see your calling as a Christian as a high one. It is one worth giving yourself completely to.

For those of you who are taking this seriously and are trying to make a difference out there in the world, I know it can get discouraging. I would suggest that you read the book of Nehemiah. In chapter 4 the people of Judah got discouraged and said, **The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall.** And Nehemiah told them, **Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses.** There are many fronts that need to be fought if we are to preserve Christianity and our families in this nation. God has not called you to every battle. He has called your families to do what they can as He enables by His providence. Nehemiah's plan was a good one.

Nehemiah assigned each family a portion of the wall to work on. Some people had more abilities and were given a larger portion. There were times when everyone had to rush to one section for defense. But because each one did His work the wall went up in record time. And the interesting thing about Nehemiah is that the whole family worked together. In a similar way, God has called together numerous families in Omaha, each with a portion of the wall to build. Christ is your Nehemiah, calling you to specific tasks. And it's important to realize that what you do right now will affect whether your children carry on the vision. If you model selfishness and self-serving now, your children will carry that even farther. If you model the vision of this chapter, your children will carry that even further. What you model to your families will make a big difference on whether your portion of the wall falls apart completely in the next generation. The church is here to encourage you to do better, but it is families that are called to their spots in the wall. We can pray for one another and learn from one another and encourage one another to stay faithful to our portions of the wall. It is my prayer that community would not be seen as a means of self-serving, but as a means for dedicated servants to build the wall to God's glory. Amen.