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# **Ephesians 4:12 Once More: 'Equipping the Saints for the Work of Ministry?'**

**John Jefferson Davis**

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'Now it is most apparent from [Ephesians 4](#) that all Christians are "in the ministry", wrote Ray Stedman in his widely read book of 1972, *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive*. 'The proper task of the ... support ministries ... is to train, motivate, and undergird the people to do the work of the ministry.'<sup>1</sup>

This understanding of the task of pastors and teachers based on a particular translation of [Ephesians 4:12](#) ['to equip the saints for the work of ministry'] has become the dominant understanding of the text in evangelical and mainline churches today. In recent years, however, this popular interpretation has been challenged by a number of scholars.<sup>2</sup> It is the purpose of this study to examine the history of interpretation of [Ephesians 4:12](#), to propose a new translation of the Greek text, and to relate this discussion to the growing interest in today's churches in 'marketplace ministries' and 'ministry in everyday life'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life: The Church Comes Alive* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> 2. See, for example, Henry P. Hamann, 'The Translation of [Ephesians 4:12](#)—A Necessary Revision', *Concordia Journal* 41 (1988), pp. 42–48; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), pp. 252–256; T. David Gordon, ' "Equipping" Ministry in [Ephesians 4](#)?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37:1 (1994), pp. 69–78.

<sup>3</sup> 3. The term 'ministry of the *laity*' is here intentionally avoided, in order not to perpetuate the unfortunate appearance of a dichotomy between the 'clergy' and the 'laity' which has plagued the church since the third century. For background on the historical development of this problematic distinction, see A. Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).

Since the end of the Second World War there has been a substantial growth of scholarly interest in the role of the 'laity' in both the church and society. A significant role in this development was played by scholars associated with projects sponsored by the Department of the Laity of the World Council of Churches. The volume edited by Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, *The Layman in Christian History* (1963) was a seminal contribution in this area.<sup>4</sup> The 1958 book by Hendrik Kraemer, *The Theology of the Laity*, was also a landmark contribution.<sup>5</sup> Postwar scholarship on the theology of the church which has highlighted such themes as the *body of Christ* and *the people of God* has also helped to recover the concept of 'every-member ministry' found in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> The recent work by Robert Banks, William Diehl, and others has heralded a real renaissance of interest in 'marketplace ministry' and 'ministry in everyday life.'<sup>7</sup>

## EPHESIANS 4:12 AND THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION: THE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS

It is of interest to note the variety of ways that the Greek text [πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ] has been rendered in the history of English translations. The 1534 translation of William Tyndale reads that Christ (v. 11) 'made some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some shepherds, some teachers: (v. 12), that the saints might have all things necessary to work and minister withal, to the edifying of the body of Christ'. The Geneva Bible of 1560, translated by William Whittingham and Anthony Gilbey when Knox and Calvin were in Geneva, reads 'For the gathering together of the Saintes, for the worke of the ministerie, for the edification of the bodie of Christ'.

The Douay-Rheims Bible of 1582, a Roman Catholic version based on the Latin Vulgate, reads 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'. Already in the sixteenth century a question of translation is apparent: should the three clauses in 4:12 be understood as coordinate [as in the Geneva Bible and Douay-Rheims], or should the second clause ['for the work of ministry'] be understood as dependent on the first ['for perfecting/equipping the saints'], as in the Tyndale rendering? Taking the second clause as dependent on the first implies an 'egalitarian' or 'every-member ministry' understanding in which all the people of God do

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<sup>4</sup> 4. Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, eds., *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> 5. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Theology of the Laity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> 6. See, for example, Lucien Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of St. Paul*, tr. Adrian Walker (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), esp. pp. 282ff., 'The Body of Christ and the People of God'; Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), esp. chapter 3, 'The People of God', and chapter 6, 'The Body of Christ'; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965); Y. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: a Study for a Theology of the Laity*, 2nd. ed. (London: Chapman, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> 7. See, for example, Robert Banks, *Redeeming the Routines: Bringing Theology to Life* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), and *God the Worker* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1992); Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens, eds., *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987); John A. Bernbaum and Simon M. Steer, *Why Work: Careers and Employment in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986); William E. Diehl, *The Monday Connection* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991). For a very extensive annotated bibliography in the area, see Pete Hammond, ed. *Marketplace Bibliography*, available from Marketplace InterVarsity, P.O. Box 7895, Madison, WI 53707.

the ‘work of ministry’, while taking the clauses as coordinate implies a more ‘hierarchical’ view of the church in which the emphasis is on the teaching ministries of the apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers, who ‘equip’ or ‘perfect’ the saints.

The King James translation of 1611 reads ‘For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ’, reflecting the so-called ‘hierarchical’ view of the church’s ministry. The American Standard Version of 1901, continuing in this tradition, reads ‘For the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ’.

The Moffatt translation of 1935 reflects the ‘traditional’ view of the text established by the King James: ‘for the equipment of the saints, for the business of the ministry, for the upbuilding of the Body of Christ’.<sup>8</sup> The ‘traditional’ view is likewise reflected in the 1944 Knox version, a Roman Catholic translation from the Vulgate, Greek, and Hebrew texts: ‘They [the teaching ministers of v. 11] are to order the lives of the faithful, minister to their needs, build up the frame of Christ’s body’.

A distinct break in the translation tradition can be seen in the Revised Standard Version of 1946, which reflected a newer ‘egalitarian’ [or ‘revisionist’] understanding of the text.<sup>9</sup> According to the RSV, Christ gave apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers to the church in order ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ’. The ‘clergy’, according to this understanding, do not do all the work of the ministry, but are to equip and train all the people of God to perform the work of ministry.

This ‘revisionist’ translation of the text appears to be followed without dissent in English translations since 1946: the New American Standard Version of 1960 [‘for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ’]; the New English Bible of 1961 [‘to equip God’s people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ’]; the New Catholic Edition of 1962 [‘in order to perfect the saints for a work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’]; the Jerusalem Bible of 1966 (Roman Catholic) [‘so that the saints together make a unity in the work of service, building up the body of Christ’]; the Today’s English Version of 1967 [‘He did this to prepare all God’s people for the work of Christian service, to build up the body of Christ’]; the New International Version (NIV) of 1978 [‘to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up’]; the New King James Version of 1982 [‘for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry’]; the New Revised Standard Version of 1989 [‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ’].

It is of interest to ask whether the new ‘revisionist’ understanding of the text that has become dominant since 1946 reflects new textual discoveries or exegetical insights, or whether perhaps the change is more reflective of a more egalitarian, democratic postwar *Zeitgeist* that has influenced both churches and Bible translators.<sup>10</sup> Any answer to such a

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<sup>8</sup> 8. In what is here termed the ‘traditional’ view established by the influential King James translation, a comma is placed between the first clause [‘for the perfecting of the saints’] and the second [‘for the work of the ministry’], implying that the teaching ministers mentioned in v. 11 are doing the ‘work of the ministry’, rather than ‘equipping the saints *for the work of ministry*’, as in the dominant modern [‘revisionist’] translation tradition.

<sup>9</sup> 9. Though not unprecedented, for the Tyndale version of 1534 seems to have anticipated this view.

<sup>10</sup> 10. In a provocative 1977 article Stanley Gundry raised a similar question in relation to changing preferences in eschatologies during church history. ‘Time and again there seems to be a connection between eschatology and the Church’s perception of itself in its historical situation ... in many cases eschatologies [premillennial, postmillennial, amillennial] appear to have been sociologically conditioned. This suggests that factors other than purely exegetical and theological considerations have been more influential in the

question would, of course, require a more detailed examination of the linguistic and syntactical issues raised by the Greek text, and of the various arguments presented by the commentators.

## EPH.4:12: THE COMMENTARY TRADITION

Over a century ago, in his 1857 commentary on the Greek text of Ephesians, Charles Hodge noted in relation to v. 4:12, 'Both the meaning of the words and the relation of the several clauses in this verse, are doubtful.'<sup>11</sup> These difficulties of translation have been reflected in the variety of renderings chosen by commentators since Hodge's time. After considering five different possibilities for understanding the syntactical relationship of the clauses [προς τον καταρτισμον ... εις εργον διακονιας ... εις οικοδομην ... ], he chooses as 'perhaps the best' the rendering 'for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ'.<sup>12</sup> In relation to this 'traditional' rendering, Hodge quotes with approval Calvin's comment that the apostle '... could not exalt more highly the ministry of the Word ... what higher work can there be than to build up the church that it may reach its perfection?'<sup>13</sup> Both Calvin and Hodge, in their 'traditional' view, see the text as emphasizing the ministry of the *teachers* of the church, rather than the 'equipping' of the saints for 'every-member' ministry as in the 'revisionist' view.

The purpose of the following review of the commentary tradition is not to consider all the exegetical issues involved, but to focus on two of the critical issues: 1) the syntactical relationship of the three prepositional clauses, and 2) the translation of the term καταρτισμος, which appears only here in the New Testament.

In his 1897 commentary in the *International Critical Commentary* series, T.K. Abbot gives the sense of the text as 'With a view to the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ'.<sup>14</sup> He notes that Chrysostom and the Authorized (King James) version take the three clauses as coordinate, and that the change in prepositions [προς ... εις ... εις] is not decisive against this, since such stylistic variety is characteristic of St. Paul. Nevertheless, he opts for a 'revisionist' rendering which subordinates the second clause to the first ['perfecting the saints *unto* the work of ministering'], since, in his view, if the three clauses were parallel, 'εργον διακονιας should certainly come first as the more indefinite and the mediate object'.<sup>15</sup>

J. Armitage Robinson, writing in 1904, also argued that the second clause should be taken as dependent on the first. He thinks that the absence of the definite articles, '... with the consequent compactness of the phrase, is strongly confirmatory of this view'. The

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history of eschatology than we would care to admit.' Stanley N. Gundry, 'Hermeneutics or Zeitgeist as the Determining Factor in the History of Eschatologies?' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20:1 (1977), pp. 45-55 at p. 50.

<sup>11</sup> 11. Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, repr. 1994; 1857), p. 227.

<sup>12</sup> 12. Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> 13. Ibid., p. 230. For the citation from Calvin, see John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, tr. T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 181.

<sup>14</sup> 14. T.K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), p. 119.

<sup>15</sup> 15. Ibid.

meaning of the text is, accordingly, 'for the complete equipment of the saints for the work of service'.<sup>16</sup>

In his 1906 commentary B.F. Westcott also anticipated the 'revisionist' view that was to become the dominant view after the Second World War. The gifted individuals of [4:11](#) were given to the church '... with a view to the perfecting of the saints for a work ...' of ministry. Westcott appealed to the context of the passage in support of this view, 'in which special stress is laid upon the ministry of every part to the welfare of the whole'.<sup>17</sup> He thinks that the change of prepositions [*προς ... εις ... εις*] shows that the three clauses are not to be taken as coordinate. 'The responsible officers of the congregation work through the others, and find no rest till everyone fulfills his function'.<sup>18</sup>

William Hendrickson is one of many commentators who since the 1960s has adopted the 'revisionist' view. The apostles and prophets have been given for the purpose of perfecting or '*providing the necessary equipment* for all the saints for the work of ministering to each other'. During the week every member should be equipped to engage in a definite ministry, 'whether that be imparting comfort to the sick, teaching, neighbourhood evangelisation, tract distribution, or whatever the task for which one is especially equipped'.<sup>19</sup>

In recent years the most influential scholarly advocate of the 'revisionist' interpretation has been Markus Barth, author of the 1974 two-volume commentary on Ephesians in the Anchor Bible series. In a footnote Barth notes that the revisionist view has been promoted since about 1940 by the work of D.T. Niles and the World Council of Churches' Departments of the Laity and of Evangelism.<sup>20</sup> Barth engages in a vigorous polemic against the traditional view, which he designates as 'aristocratic-clerical', since he thinks that in this understanding laymen are '... ultimately only beneficiaries [of ministry], and ... the benefits of the clergy's work remain inside the church—though people and power outside the church may witness the clergy's successes and failures'.<sup>21</sup> Barth thinks that the context and parallels of [4:12](#) support the revisionist interpretation: 1) the grace given to the saints in [4:7](#) is the same ministerial grace given to the apostle Paul; 2) in [4:7](#) all the saints are recipients of grace from on high; 3) in [1 Cor. 12:7, 18](#) the Spirit is given to every believer for the common good; and 4), there is but one calling or vocation in the church, the call of God into his kingdom.<sup>22</sup> In summary, 'the task of the special ministers mentioned in [Eph. 4:11](#) is to be servants in that ministry which is entrusted to the whole church'.<sup>23</sup>

To round out this survey of the revisionist interpretation, the comments of Leslie Mitton (1976) and Ronald Fung (1982) will be briefly noted. Adopting the now common

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<sup>16</sup> 16. J. Armitage Robinson, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: James Clarke, 1904), p. 182.

<sup>17</sup> 17. Brooke Foss Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> 18. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> 19. William Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 198. It might be noted that Hendriksen, while supporting the 'every-member' concept of ministry, still seems to understand this in terms of 'religious' activities, rather than 'marketplace' ministry or 'ministry in the workplace' as well.

<sup>20</sup> 20. Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), p. 479, n. 265.

<sup>21</sup> 21. *Ibid.*, p. 479.

<sup>22</sup> 22. *Ibid.*, p. 480.

<sup>23</sup> 23. *Ibid.*, p. 481.



reading ‘to equip the saints for the work of ministry’, Mitton goes on to add that ‘*the work of ministry* is not something done by a special person in the Church so much as that for which all church members ... are being prepared’.<sup>24</sup> Taking a functional view of the text, he believes that ‘... the whole membership of the Church is to be prepared for service ... The emphasis is on what the members should be *doing*’ [emphasis in the original].<sup>25</sup>

Ronald Fung takes the first εἰς as subordinate to πρὸς, and the second εἰς as dependent on the previous phrase together, so that the sense is ‘to equip God’s people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ’.<sup>26</sup> This rendering, he believes, does justice to the different prepositions in the Greek, to the emphasis in v. 11 on the ministers appointed by Christ, and to the corresponding emphasis on the part played by each believer (v. 16) in the growth of the body of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

This exegetical consensus in favour of the ‘revisionist’ interpretation has been challenged in recent years, however. In his 1988 article Henry Hamann argued that the popular translations that linked the first and second clauses, ‘equipping the saints *for* the work of ministry’, were not supported by careful lexical studies of the words καταρτιζω and καταρτισμος. According to Hamann, the lexicons show that the verbal force of these terms, with the exception of only a few instances, comes to an end in the direct accusative noun.<sup>28</sup> That is to say, ‘equipping of the saints’ would represent one complete thought, and ‘for the work of ministry’ would constitute a second complete thought not immediately dependent on the first—as understood by the King James translators.<sup>29</sup> Hamann went so far as to say that the popular translation was motivated by a ‘dogmatic position’ on the part of those ‘... who for one reason or another are anti-clerical [and] see here a convenient text to support their point of view’.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the most forceful criticism of the revisionist interpretation is found in the 1990 commentary of Andrew Lincoln. He argues that the now popular view, often appealing to the change of prepositions from πρὸς to εἰς, cannot bear the weight of such an argument. No grammatical or linguistic grounds exist for making a specific link between the first and second clauses; the primary context here in v. 12 is the role and specific function of the ministers enumerated in v. 11, not ‘all the saints’. The change in prepositions is more likely to be simply a stylistic variation, for the stringing together of prepositional phrases, all dependent on the main verb and coordinated with one another

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<sup>24</sup> 24. C. Leslie Mitton, *New Century Bible: Ephesians* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1976), p. 151.

<sup>25</sup> 25. Ibid., p. 152. While it is true that every member should be prepared for the work of ministry, it will be argued later in this paper that the primary focus of the text is not so much functional as ‘doctrinal-ethical’, that is to say, that the apostle’s primary concern is not so much on what the believer is doing in ministry as on Christian faith and character—on what the believer is more so that what the believer does—though both of course are important.

<sup>26</sup> 26. Ronald Y.K. Fung, ‘The Nature of Ministry according to Paul’, *Evangelical Quarterly* 54 (1982), pp. 129–146 at p. 141.

<sup>27</sup> 27. Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> 28. Hamann, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> 29. The force of this argument seems to be weakened somewhat by the fact that in [2 Tim. 3:17](#) a related word, ἐξαρτιζω, is used with a prepositional phrase which is clearly dependent upon it: ‘that the man of God may be equipped for every good work’ (πρὸς παν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐξηρτισμενός).

<sup>30</sup> 30. Ibid. It does not seem very plausible, however, to suppose that commentators such as Robinson, Westcott, and Hendrickson, who support the revisionist view, are ‘anti-clerical’ in their sentiments.

is characteristic of the writer's style (cf. [4:13](#), [4:14](#), [6:12](#), and [1:5, 6](#)).<sup>31</sup> Although the building up of the body of the Christ involves all the members (v. [16](#)), in this context the ministers have a particularly significant role to play in it, inasmuch as the transmission and interpretation of the apostolic gospel is foundational for the growth and health of the church.<sup>32</sup> Lincoln suspects that '... opting for the other [revisionist] view is too often motivated by a zeal to avoid clericalism and to support a "democratic" model of the church'.<sup>33</sup>

This challenge to the revisionist interpretation has also been supported by T. David Gordon in his 1994 journal article on [Ephesians 4:12](#). Gordon argues that apart from clear indications to the contrary, it is most natural to assume that the three prepositional clauses all have the same subjects, namely the gifted ministers enumerated in [4:11](#). If in fact the apostle had intended to subordinate the thought of the second clause to the first, the most natural way to have done this would have been to omit the second and third prepositions and have two complementary infinitives joined by the copula, such that the text would have read *προς τον καταρτισμον τον αγιον εργειν τεν διακονιαν και οικοδομειν τεν σοματα του χριστου*.<sup>34</sup> But this is not in fact how the text actually reads, and this seems to be a strong argument against the revisionist reading. In *this context* the emphasis is not on the work of ministry carried out by the saints, but on that carried out by the gifted ones of v. [11](#): the ministry and service of the Word.<sup>35</sup>

## A SUGGESTED TRANSLATION AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

In light of the foregoing discussion, the following is proposed as a translation of [4:11, 12](#):

<sup>11</sup>And he gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets,  
some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers,  
<sup>12</sup>for bringing the saints to maturity, for the work of  
ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

The rendering 'for bringing the saints to maturity' is chosen from the variety of possible lexical meanings of *καταρτισμος*<sup>36</sup> as the meaning that best fits the immediate context: 'building up the body of Christ' (v. [12](#)); 'to mature manhood' (v. [13](#)); 'the stature of the fullness of Christ' (v. [13](#)); 'that we may no longer be children' (v. [14](#)); 'we are to grow up in every way' (v. [15](#)); 'bodily growth' (v. [16](#)). The immediate context is filled with images of a body growing toward adult maturity—physical growth being a metaphor for the doctrinal and ethical maturation which is the apostle's chief concern.

The now dominant revisionist translation of '*equipping* the saints for the work of ministry' gives what could be called a 'functional-pragmatic' emphasis to what, in the judgment of this writer, should be recognized as the 'doctrinal-ethical' or

<sup>31</sup> 31. Lincoln, op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>32</sup> 32. Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>33</sup> 33. Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>34</sup> 34. Gordon, op. cit., p. 71.

<sup>35</sup> 35. In agreement with Lincoln; cf. notes 31–33 above.

<sup>36</sup> 36. In addition to the commentaries cited above, see the standard lexica such as Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 418; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 910; Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 717.



*characterological* emphasis of the immediate text and the entire epistle.<sup>37</sup> The apostle's chief concern is not so much what the saints are *doing* as acts of ministry, though this is important, but rather what they *are* and are *becoming*, as those whose Christian faith and character reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

This emphasis on doctrinal-ethical formation or characterological concerns is evident not only in the immediate context of [4:13–16](#) as noted above, but also in the more remote context of the epistle as well. Believers were chosen before the foundation of the universe to be *holy and blameless* before God ([1:4](#)). In his prayers for the new believers, the emphasis of the apostle is on growth in wisdom and insight ([1:17](#)); the dwelling of Christ in the heart of the believer and the believer's deeper experience of the love of Christ ([3:17–19](#)); leading a life worthy of their calling ([4:1](#)); being imitators of God ([5:1](#)).

This is not to say that the revisionist 'equipping', 'every-member' ministry concept is without justification in the text, for the writer indeed states that grace for ministry is given to each one ([4:7](#)) and the body grows when *each part* is working properly ([4:16](#)). The concerns of 'marketplace ministries' are consistent with the eternal plan of God to finally bring all things in heaven and *on earth* into right relationship under the headship of Christ ([1:10](#)). The church as the body of Christ is the fullness of him who is to fill all things with his presence, power, and authority (cf. [1:23](#)). Believers are God's workmanship, created anew in Christ to do good works in church and society (cf. [2:10](#)).

Nevertheless, the point to made here is that the revisionist interpretation of [Ephesians 4:12](#) seems to make *primary* what is in fact a *secondary* emphasis in the text. While the concept of 'body life' or 'every-member' ministry is theologically true in the light of Pauline and New Testament teachings, in this text the focus is on the special teaching ministries of the ministers enumerated in [4:11](#) rather than the various ministries of all the saints. Hence the 'traditional' choice of punctuation of the three coordinate clauses was chosen in the translation above, reflecting the force of the grammatical and syntactical arguments presented by Lincoln and Gordon.

This article, then, attempts to suggest a synthesis of the scholarly concerns reflected in the history of the interpretation of this crucial Pauline ecclesiological text. It recognizes the modern movement to acknowledge the validity of a concept of ministry which calls every member of the body of Christ to ministry in the service of Christ—not only in the church, but in the marketplace and the world as well. There is, however, a danger of 'proving the right doctrines from the wrong texts', and obscuring the main point of the text, which is, in this case, held to be *characterological* and doctrinal-ethical in the first instance, rather than functional or pragmatic.

The primary calling of the Christian is to reflect the holy and blameless character of Jesus Christ—in the family, in the church, and in the workplace. In bringing the people of God to moral and spiritual maturity, the teaching ministries of the gifted ministers of the Word have a central and strategic significance. In our modern and postmodern social worlds, every-member ministry is vitally important, but the *formation of Christian character* is, as the text of [Ephesians 4:11, 12](#) reminds us, if anything more vital yet.

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<sup>37</sup> 37. In a most interesting historical and sociological observation, David Wells has noted that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, most obituaries published in American newspapers mentioned the character of the deceased, while at the end of the century the emphasis was on the occupation of the person. He believes that this substitution of function for character in the understanding of the person is one of the characteristics of modernity: David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), p. 11. Wells addresses the issues of the loss of character and virtue in the modern church in *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

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# Collection in the Early Church

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## INTRODUCTION

The Old and New Testaments place a great deal of emphasis on giving. In fact, there are more verses related to giving than any other subject on money. There are commands, practical suggestions, examples and exhortations concerning this facet of stewardship. Everywhere in the Bible covetousness and greed are condemned, and generosity and charity are encouraged. The saying of Jesus Christ is quoted in [Acts 20:35](#), 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

The specific campaign that Paul led to collect funds to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem church is commonly called 'collection for the saints'. On the surface the general notion of the collection is quite simple, but the question of Paul's purpose raises some complex issues.

In today's church hardly any worship service take place without a collection of money. This seems to have been implicit even in the early church. Justin Martyr from the middle of the second century remarks that 'each member who is well-to-do and willing gives as he pleases, and the amount is deposited with the presiding minister'.<sup>1</sup> Later John Wesley said: 'Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can.'<sup>2</sup>; each of these reflects the attitude towards stewardship of finance within the church at the time. Similarly based on the biblical teaching, churches today place emphasis on teaching their members to give for the work of God. But it cannot be regarded as an essential ingredient of Christian worship.

In this paper I do not intend to deal with the Old Testament data which relate to 'tithes and offerings' in the Levitical, monarchial and post-exilic periods of the nation's history,

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<sup>1</sup> 1. Quoted by Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> 2. Quoted by Boyd M. McKeown, *Stewardship in Methodism* (New York: The Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), p. 26.