

The Global Church Attaining to the Fullness of Christ:

An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:7-16

Kim Pullen

Liberty University

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Dr. Fernando Abella

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When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians around 60 AD,¹ he arguably did so from a Roman prison² and with deep concern for the brothers and sisters in the church he founded and spent three years striving to build up in love (Acts 20:31 [New International Version]). His letter is a powerful, often-poetic, and divinely inspired exhortation to disciples of Christ even two millennia later. In an ancient world blanketed by a Hellenistic culture that glorified selfish ambition, power, and idolatry, Paul recalled to the brothers and sisters of the Ephesian church that they, as (mostly) Gentile believers, were part of the great mystery “revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets,” and they were “heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:5-6).

Just as the race, gender, and socio-economic conflicts in today’s church hinder harmony and collaboration, unity between such historical rivals as Jews and Gentiles was not easy to come by even in a church established by an apostle and eyewitness to the Risen Savior. In Ephesians 4:7-16, after appealing to the disciples’ co-honored status as inheritors to God’s kingdom (Eph 1:13-14, 18-21) which seemed ethereal in light of Roman domination, Paul called the Ephesian believers to acknowledge Christ’s “gifts” to them in the form of their leaders whose role was to parent the church to maturity. **This appeal transcends the centuries and calls the modern, global church—collectively and individually—to acknowledge a corporate vulnerability to false teachings due to the neglect of the contextual study of Scripture and instead to deliberately engage with mature, qualified, biblically-literate leaders to become equipped, built up, unified, and “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).**

¹Ernest Best, Introduction to *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1998), 19.

²Ibid, 295–96.

Historical Context

To embrace the apostle's appeal to today's church, it is important to first understand the historical context of Paul's letter. In the first century, Ephesus, "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia,"³ was located on several important trade routes, both land and sea.⁴ The third-largest city in the empire behind Rome and Alexandria, it came under Roman control in 133 BC⁵ and had a population between 200,00 and 250,000.⁶ Originally founded around 1000 BC,⁷ it was a city rich in history and boasted numerous public buildings including the temple of Artemis, a structure four times the size of the Parthenon.⁸ While it is generally accepted that Paul's letter was written to "the church" in Ephesus, it is more likely that it was written to a number of churches throughout Asia Minor.⁹

The church was established when Paul visited Ephesus, met with a dozen Jewish disciples—probably a remnant of the Judean dispersion of Acts 8:1—and started teaching both in the local synagogue and later in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19). His three-year impact (Acts 20:31) was such that Luke states "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the [whole] province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). Part of this impact occurred due to miraculous healings associated with Paul (Acts 19:11) and part due to fear and awe that swept

³Joel B. Green and Lee M. McDonald, eds., *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 506.

⁴Ibid, 506.

⁵Ibid, 507.

⁶Ibid, 508.

⁷Ibid, 507.

⁸Ibid, 509.

⁹Best, *A Critical*, 2.

the community in response to a mass beating of a chief priest's sons by a demon who confirmed Paul's authority (Acts 19:12-20). After Paul left Ephesus for Jerusalem and eventually Rome, his dire warnings to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 came to pass—men from within the church rose in power and began to distort the gospel message, dividing the church.

However, power-hungry leaders teaching false doctrines were probably not the primary divisive tool. Undercurrents of hostility had brewed between Jews and Gentiles for centuries. Initially granted by God their Promised Land (the Fertile Crescent) after their exodus from Egypt, Jews were scattered throughout the Greco-Roman world due to the great dispersion (or Diaspora) that happened in the wake of Assyrian and Babylonian invasions into the Northern and the Southern kingdoms of Israel more than 500 years before.¹⁰ As Daniel predicted (Dn 2:40, 7:7), Rome followed Persia and Greece to become Israel's next great oppressor. Of the Romans, Tacitus said, "They ransacked the world, and afterwards, when all the land has been laid waste by their pillaging, they scour the sea...They plunder, they murder, they rape, in the name of their so-called empire. And where they have made a desert, they call it peace."¹¹

Cultural Context

As modern Bible readers are displaced from the original audience by time, geography, and language, it is also imperative to understand the cultural context of Paul's letter. Ultimately, the dispersion of the Jews led to a diluting of culture as the people of Israel and Judea (along with every other subdued nation) were integrated and assimilated by each oppressive regime.¹²

¹⁰N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins Christian, 2019), 143.

¹¹Ibid, 30.

¹²Saskia T. Roselaar, *Processes of Cultural Change and Integration in the Roman World* (Boston, MA: BRILL, 2015), chap. 1.

Although some Jews strove to obey the Torah by not intermarrying with non-Jews, such refusals were seen as misanthropic and disdainful by their Greco-Roman “patrons.”¹³ Even the Jewish language was impacted due to Alexander’s Hellenizing programs of the fourth century BC such that the entire Hebrew Bible was translated into Koine Greek (the Septuagint) and favored by the Jews of Jesus’ time.¹⁴

However, the cultural aspect that caused the most friction between Jews and Gentiles was religion, as even for the Greeks, “religion was very much intertwined with social and political life.”¹⁵ Indeed, the way Roman cities were built was a constant reminder of how out of sync Jews and first century Christians were compared to their Roman neighbors as major city centers like Ephesus were a “visible parable about the interlocking relationship between the city, the gods, and the emperor.”¹⁶ Most of the Roman city-states had large temples devoted to the worship of specific gods. Although Rome normally compelled its subjects to worship these gods, because of a history of Jewish rebellion under such constraints, the Christians were exempt as the Romans saw them as simply another Jewish sect.¹⁷ While this truce may have kept the external peace, internal rebellion never ceased. In the first century, messianic expectations in the form of revolts or false prophets were high¹⁸ as evidenced by the proliferation of the Zealots,¹⁹ Jesus’ encounters

¹³Tessa Rajak, "The Jewish Diaspora in Greco-Roman Antiquity," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 72, no. 2 (2018): 152.

¹⁴Douglas A. Jacoby, *A Quick Overview of the Bible: Understanding How All the Pieces Fit Together*. (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2012), 184.

¹⁵Wright and Bird, *The New Testament*, 147.

¹⁶Ibid, 151.

¹⁷Jacoby, *A Quick*, 183.

¹⁸Jacoby, *A Quick*, 183.

¹⁹Ibid, 180.

with impetuous, misguided followers (John 6:14-15), and even his own apostles after his resurrection (Acts 1:6). Paul instead calls the disciples in Ephesus to see God’s purposes fulfilled in Christ who brought “all things in heaven and on earth together under one head” (Acts 1:10).

Literary Context

Without understanding the literary context of Ephesians, twenty-first century Christians can read concepts into or draw concepts out of the text the author never intended, and which the original audience never conceived.²⁰ This is why it is imperative to understand how the key text (Eph 4:7-16) and the rest of the letter of Ephesians should be read. While the bulk of Ephesians is in letter form, Paul quotes two lines of poetry (4:8 and 5:14). The first is part of the key text and is a modified version of Psalm 68:18. There are various theories as to why Paul changed the original wording of this passage; this will be discussed later.

Paul utilizes a variety of literary devices in the key text, including figures of speech and parallelism. However, to prepare his audience for his appeal about spiritual gifts and unity of the body, Paul uses powerful repetition and chiasm. In verses 4-5, Paul states: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” The word “one” is repeated seven times creating a chiasm with the word “Lord” at the center. Starting in verse 7, Paul then uses figures of speech that might otherwise be found in poetry. After quoting Psalm 68:18 and declaring Christ’s gift-giving propensities, he tells the Ephesians that Jesus gave them gifts in the form of people—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (4:11). In verses 12-13, he also uses a type of climatic language “to give it a more dramatic

²⁰E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 16.

emphasis”²¹ when he uses the connectors, “so that,” “until we all,” and “become” and climaxes with “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Next, Paul uses figures of speech in the form of charged language or dramatic visuals when he says these adult believers will no longer be “infants” (spiritually immature or naïve), tossed by the “waves” and blown by the “winds” of false teachers (4:14). Then, as the apostle has repeatedly done in other letters, he uses the human body as a metaphor for the church, with Jesus being the “head,” the church being the “body,” and even the individuals within the body as “ligaments” (4:15-16). Finally, Paul utilizes a narrative version of an antithetical parallelism when he compares their current state of immaturity (4:14) to their ultimate state of fulfillment, hinging this comparison with the connector “instead” (4:15).

The Meaning of Ephesians 4:7-16

Everyone who reads Scripture is an interpreter. It is, therefore, imperative for noble-hearted Christians who seek to obey the whole of Scripture and discern an accurate and authentic hermeneutic of God’s Word to acknowledge that some passages are difficult to assign meaning without assistance. The Apostle Peter said of Paul, “His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pt 3:16). The first section of the key passage (Eph 4:7-10) is a prime example of Paul’s own hermeneutical acuity.

²¹Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, revised and expanded ed. (n.p.: Zondervan Academic, 2007), 144.

Ephesians 4:7-10

Paul uses “but” in the beginning of verse 7 as a bridge to connect verses 1-4 (where he addresses their “oneness”) with verse 8 and following (where he addresses the individual gifts they receive to be used to connect the body). In verse 8, he quotes from Psalm 68 which is “widely assessed as textually and exegetically ‘the most difficult and obscure of all the Psalms’.”²² There are many theories as to why Paul used this OT verse and more peculiarly about the verb change from “he received” in Psalm 68:18 to “he gave” in Ephesians 4:8. Some contend Jewish or Christian tradition reshaped this text and Paul was simply borrowing from this.²³ Jonathan Lunde and John Dunne, however, propose that Paul, upon meditation of the whole of Psalm 68,²⁴ did not abandon the psalmist’s meaning or context,²⁵ but actually used it to “rebut the Jewish tradition that the law was God’s pre-eminent gift for righteous living.”²⁶ Paul uses this psalm in particular because “it summarizes the historical parallel between God’s actions in the psalm and those accomplished by Jesus”²⁷; Paul simply “shifts the verbal referents of the verse to fit their new fulfillment moment.”²⁸

²²Jonathan M. Lunde and John A. Dunne, "Paul's Creative and Contextual Use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4: 8," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 71, no. 1 (2012): 100.

²³Ibid, 101–03.

²⁴Ibid, 106.

²⁵Ibid, 101.

²⁶Ibid, 104.

²⁷Ibid, 108.

²⁸Ibid, 108.

Further, Paul's midrashic commentary on the ascent and descent in verse 9-10 is a bridge he uses to discuss the spiritual gifts introduced in verse 8 and expanded on in verses 11-16.²⁹ Lunde and Dunne state: "After Yahweh had defeated the enemies of his people and ascended 'on high' (Ps 68:18), he blessed his people 'from his sanctuary' (Ps 68:35). So also has Christ ascended to the right hand of God (1:20) after his conquest of death, sin, and the spiritual foes of his people, resulting in the outpouring of the Spirit,"³⁰ his ultimate gift. Is Paul violating Revelations 22:18-19 by taking away or adding to Scripture? Not at all. On the contrary, "there are now new actors in the drama, necessitating a reshaping of the psalmist's thoughts."³¹

Verses 7-10 are also significant evidence to support E.D. Hirsch's theory on meaning—especially the syntactical theological method—that "the literary work is determined by the author's intentions."³² The New Criticism theory, the Truth and Method theory, and the Interpretation Theory, which Kaiser calls the three "New Humpty Dumptys,"³³ would lie broken and unreparable in the face of Paul's deliberate and creative use of Psalm 68 in Ephesians 4. Thousands of years before Hirsch and others combined the grammatico-historical method with theological relevance,³⁴ Paul conjoined the psalmist's original vision of God's ascension from the wasteland (Ps 68:7) to Zion (Ps 68:18) with Jesus' ascension from death to heaven, and then the apostle transcended God's reception of captives' gifts into Jesus' generous dispensation of

²⁹Lunde and , "Paul's Creative," 110.

³⁰Ibid, 110.

³¹Ibid, 114.

³²Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction*, 32.

³³Ibid, 30.

³⁴Ibid, 35.

the Holy Spirit and qualified leaders to the church. When “Paul shifts the verbal referents of the verse to fit their new fulfillment,”³⁵ he refutes that the Torah was God’s ultimate gift for righteousness,³⁶ and he demonstrates that “the task of locating meaning is not finished until one apprehends the purpose, scope, or reasons (indeed, theology) for which the text was written.”³⁷

Ephesians 4:11-13

Springboarding from his theoretical transformation of Psalm 68:18 and that all disciples have been granted gifts for the benefit of the body (4:7), Paul dives into his description of leaders as Jesus’ gifts to the church. While some characteristics of these leadership roles overlap, it is important to note that all five require the ability to teach others³⁸ with the singular purpose of equipping God’s people to perform their works of service (Eph 4:12). An *apostle* was someone whose authority was not derived from their skills or special talents but was characterized by their witness to the resurrected Christ, their stewardship of “the knowledge of the secret things of Christ,” and “from the gospel of truth.”³⁹ *Prophets* seemed to have a dual role in the NT. Some, like Agabus or Anna, spoke to God’s people of future events (Acts 11:28, Lk 2:38). After Pentecost, Paul said they were to edify the church by strengthening, encouraging, and comforting the disciples (1 Cor 14:1-5). *Evangelists* were responsible for proclaiming the good news of the gospel that built faith, brought salvation and judgment, revealed God’s OT promises fulfilled

³⁵Lunde and , "Paul's Creative," 108.

³⁶Ibid, 104.

³⁷Kaiser and Silva, *Introduction*, 35.

³⁸Emmanuel O. Oyemomi, "Church Growth and Spiritual Gifts," *Practical Theology (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos)* 5 (2012): 136.

³⁹Ibid, 129.

through Christ, and established the church.⁴⁰ The *pastor* or shepherd role in the church was given to those who cared for the flock. *Teachers* have the task “to explain details of Christian faith to others, through the whole biblical truth.”⁴¹

There is some modern debate that these leaders were/are actually responsible for all three of the actions listed in verses 12-13—prepare the people, unify them, and bring them to maturity⁴²—but this thought does not account for a contextual reading of Scripture and of the passage, namely 4:17 (“as each part does its work”). When discussing the community function of teachers, Peter W. Gosnell states, “The ultimate outcome of heeding Christ’s ‘gifts’ [leaders] comes in the end not solely from those teachers, but from all believers.”⁴³ Once they equip the people, all the believers collectively are responsible for works of service, building up the body, becoming unified, and maturing.⁴⁴ In this way, the church works not as “just a collection of individual body parts”⁴⁵ but as the integrated whole human body to which Paul refers throughout his letters (Romans 12:4-5, 1 Cor 12:12-27, Col 2:19). David deSilva suggests that attaining “to the whole measure of the fullness in Christ” (4:13), starts with the church recognizing its lack,

⁴⁰Oyemomi, "Church Growth," 133.

⁴¹Ibid, 131.

⁴²Dale L. Lemke, "A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 279.

⁴³Peter W. Gosnell, "Networks and Exchanges: Ephesians 4:7-16 and the Community Function of Teachers," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (2000): 141.

⁴⁴Lemke, "A Philosophy," 279.

⁴⁵Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth Through Online Education* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 56.

acknowledging Christ's wholeness, and that only together, utilizing all our gifts, can we realize such a lofty stature.⁴⁶

Ephesians 4:14-16

After reminding the Ephesians of the unified goal they should have in becoming the spiritual embodiment of Christ, Paul cuts to the quick in verse 14 calling these disciples “infants.” Has Paul gotten word that they have “fallen prey to false teaching”⁴⁷ or is he reflecting on their pre-Christian state? Ernest Best declares it is the former since, “prior to conversion, believers had not been immature children, but dead in sin and under the power of Satan.”⁴⁸ In addition, Paul continues to exhort them in verses 17 and following. Either way, he is addressing immaturity that produces a “childish vulnerability to all manner of deceitful teachings.”⁴⁹ In addition to using the metaphor of infancy for immaturity, Paul uses the metaphors of the sea (wind and waves) which his Ancient Eastern (AE) audience would clearly understand to be “the forces of chaos and opponents for the divine warrior” much like Daniel contrasted the beasts coming out of the ocean with “one like the son of man” in Daniel 7.⁵⁰ Perhaps he also used these figures of speech to draw their attention to the serpent in Genesis 3 who, like these false teachers, was “deliberately misrepresenting the truth and seeking by skillful manipulation to lead believers astray.”⁵¹ The antithesis, Paul declares in verse 15, is not speaking with lies that confuse and lead

⁴⁶David deSilva, *Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 214–15.

⁴⁷Ibid, 216.

⁴⁸Best, *A Critical*, 204.

⁴⁹deSilva, *Ephesians*, 216.

⁵⁰Robin A. Parry, *The Biblical Cosmos: A Pilgrim's Guide to the Weird and Wonderful World of the Bible*, illustrated ed. (n.p.: Cascade Books, 2014), 45.

⁵¹Best, *A Critical*, 406.

others away from benefiting the body, but speaking the truth of the gospel in love since believers were meant to “console, strengthen, and correct one another through the gospel.”⁵² DeSilva states, “Such constant truth-telling maintains the focus of each member of the body on, and directs them to, what is productive for the growth of the body.”⁵³ The goal of “growing up into him who is the Head” (4:15) is “living more fully into the example of Christ, grounding oneself more deeply in the love and knowledge of Christ, or allowing Christ to live ever more fully in and through oneself”⁵⁴ in collaboration with others doing the same.

In drawing this portion of his exhortation to a close, Paul reminds his audience in verse 16 that while the leaders are his gifts to bring about this work, “Christ is the hero of this passage.”⁵⁵ The apostle shifts back to his ready metaphor of the church as a human body and, as he does in 1 Corinthians 12, uses an actual body part (ligaments) to describe the connections and interactions required for a healthy ecology.⁵⁶ Since the medical term “ligaments” meant something different to the AE audience than it does to modern readers, Best suggests that to accurately capture Paul’s meaning, it would be better to interpret it not just as ligaments, but also arteries and nerves, since only collectively do these three terms convey the body’s interactivity of nourishment, energy, connectivity, and information exchange.⁵⁷

⁵²Best, *A Critical*, 407.

⁵³deSilva, *Ephesians*, 217.

⁵⁴Ibid, 217.

⁵⁵Lemke, "A Philosophy," 279.

⁵⁶Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies*, 53.

⁵⁷Best, *A Critical*, 411.

Returning to the argument of whether the leaders alone were meant to prepare God's people for works of service, build up the body, and achieve unity, verse 16 makes it clear that Paul meant for "each part of the body to do its [own] work" rather than what modern believers refer to as a clergy-laity division of responsibilities: "Each member has a proportional contribution to offer and makes it toward the growth of the body as a whole."⁵⁸ This agrees with what Paul teaches in his other letters (1 Corinthians 12:12-26, Romans 12:4-5, Colossians 2:19). As DeSilva concludes, "The vision of 4:7-16 offers an elaboration both of the individual commitments that make the preservation of 'the unity of the Spirit' possible (cf. 4:1-6) and, at the same time, the collective achievement that the preservation of the 'the unity of the Spirit' makes possible."⁵⁹

Significance

Despite the Industrial Revolution, Age of Enlightenment, and the Protestant Reformation, little has changed since the first century where human nature is concerned. Paul's letters to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians reveal the battle that raged to keep the early church from degrading into another human sect or political organization. Though Ephesians 4:7-16 is only a small excerpt of Paul's full letter to the disciples in Asia Minor, it is the apostle's reminder to first and twenty-first century Christians alike that Christ's church is intended to reflect the original ecology created in the Garden with a "mutual harmony of reciprocally directed wills."⁶⁰ Instead, many of today's churches are marred with division and

⁵⁸Best, *A Critical*, 412.

⁵⁹deSilva, *Ephesians*, 220.

⁶⁰Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies*, 175.

divisiveness, pride and prejudice, and independence and individualism. This has led to a general spiritual ignorance and immaturity where sin is left unaddressed, hearts become hardened, and churchgoers look and live more and more like the pre-Mosaic Israelites where “everyone did as they say fit” (Jgs 21:25).

Application

As noted earlier, Paul declared that godly teachers were Christ’s gifts to the church, but it seems that few leaders today are following the apostle’s exhortation to Timothy to “entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2). James declared that leaders will be held to a higher standard because of their role (Jam 3:1). If leaders in local churches are isolated from one another and resistant to the exchange of nutrients and resources with fellow church leaders, how can they teach their members to give and exchange resources with one another? Leaders must be equipped so they can in turn equip others and build a team of leaders to distribute the load throughout their congregations. Only after a team of faithful, spirit-led, united leaders are built up can the church be prepared for works of service, unity, and maturity. Only in a congregation where men and women are maturing through personal and collective spiritual growth can marks of immaturity—ignorance, self-centeredness, impatience, and independence—be recognized and coaxed from the teachable or exposed and denounced in the prideful. It is often a slow, painful, and laborious process since maturity cannot be fast-tracked (Hebrews 2:10).

In addition, disciples who *claim* to follow Jesus should be lovingly *called* to follow Jesus by putting off their old selves and putting on the new selves since we are created to be like God (Eph 4:22-23). This includes addressing sins that Paul highlights throughout the rest of

Ephesians including impurity, sensuality, deceit, anger, theft, bitterness, slander, malice, greed, and sexual immorality. Instead of taking a “hands-off” approach for fear of a negative response, brothers and sisters need to love each other enough to call one another out of complacency and sin. As with the leaders, this requires voluntary discipleship (1 Cor 11:1), a noble and discerning heart (Acts 17:10-12), and a commitment to let the Bible be the standard for life inside and outside the church (2 Tim 3:16).

Finally, only while the body is actively being built up, growing in unity, and deliberately moving toward maturity can false teaching that “diminishes Christ’s person and work”⁶¹ be recognized, respectfully challenged, and lovingly disciplined from the hearts and minds of the those in error. In the first century, false teachings came in the form of ascetism, Gnosticizing Christians with a Judaizing bent, Judaizing Christians with a Gnosticizing bent, or some mix of the three.⁶² Today, false teachings come in as many forms as there are church buildings including those who believe they can grow and mature in Christ without being connected to a body of believers or even basing their faith on a contextual reading of Scripture. Despite differences in centuries, languages, culture, and geography, the Apostle Paul’s exhortation to all Christians for unity has not diminished. Only as an ecologically interdependent organism can the global church fulfill Jesus’ mission to spread the contagion of holiness throughout the world,⁶³ “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:17).

⁶¹Scot McKnight and Greg Mamula, eds., *Conflict Management and the Apostle Paul*, 1st ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 154.

⁶²Ibid, 157.

⁶³Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies*, 193.

Conclusion

In Revelations 2, the resurrected and enthroned Jesus commends the Ephesian church for taking Paul's exhortations to heart by testing, discipling, and if necessary, expunging false prophets from the church and persevering through hardship. However, these faithful disciples forgot what—or better, who—it was all for. Jesus is every Christian's beginning and end (Col 1:1-18). Only by purposefully, lovingly, and interdependently exchanging our resources to grow up individually and collectively into him who is the Head (Eph 4:15) will the twenty-first century church keep its lampstand burning. "He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7).

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