

**A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH
AS GOD'S DESIGNED AGENT AND SETTING FOR THE MINISTRY OF
MUTUAL CHRISTIAN CARE**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

In the subject of Systematic Theology

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR ADRIO KÖNIG

JUNE 2015

Summary

The New Testament writings provide abundant information about the mutual care ministries of church members toward one another. These ministries cover the New Testament landscape, with various examples and commands in both the narratives in Acts and the prescriptive one-another passages in the epistles. Sadly, standard systematic theology manuals give little treatment to this major New Testament theme. Many say little about any form of church ministry, fewer address ministries to members, and fewer still address member-to-member ministries, mentioning only the work of elders and deacons.

Chapter one overviews the New Testament evidence and summarizes the deficiencies among systematic theologians. It provides justification for my thesis, namely, that the New Testament presents the church as God's designed agent and setting for the ministry of mutual Christian care.

Chapter two explores four ways the New Testament uses the term church: household church, citywide church, regional church, and universal church. We focus on the first two, with the stress on local churches meeting in homes as the normal setting for shared life and mutual ministry. Moreover, the pictures of the church as Christ's body, God's family, and God's new priesthood encouraged members to serve their Christian brothers and sisters.

Chapter three demonstrates that the ultimate foundation of all New Testament one-another ministry is found in the salvation work of the triune God. God, Christ, and his Spirit provide models and motives for church members, as recipients of his redemptive grace, to minister to each other. God's love in Christ, Christ's self-sacrificial death on the cross, and the Spirit's relational graces (e.g., the "fruit" of the Spirit) and ministry gifts guide and empower church members to care for each other.

Chapter four examines seventeen varied ways that the New Testament describes and prescribes these practical ministries of mutual care, organizing them under three headings—attitudes, actions, and words. These seventeen ministry categories show the wide range of ways in which the New Testament called church members to care for the physical and spiritual needs of fellow members.

Chapter five provides a brief conclusion with five summary lessons and some suggestions for further study.

Ten Key Terms (for library retrieval):

Ministry, Mutual Ministry, Care, Church, Local Church, House Church, Church Family, One-another, Fellowship, Spiritual Gifts

Declarative Statement by Robert D. Jones

I declare that “A Biblical-Theological Study of the New Testament Church as God’s Designed Agent and Setting for the Ministry of Mutual Christian Care” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed: *Robert David Jones* (electronic)

Date: 19 June 2015

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people who helped me complete the Doctor of Theology program, including this thesis.

I want to thank President Danny Akin, the Deans, and the Trustees of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, for giving me two half-sabbaticals at two key stages in my program to allow me to give concentrated focus on my thesis work. They and my fellow faculty members encouraged me to persevere.

I want to thank my fellow pastors, care group leaders, and members of Open Door Church in Raleigh, NC, for covering some of my pastoral care duties and being patient with me when my mind was preoccupied with doctoral studies. They also encouraged me to press on with my thesis. Moreover, they modeled for me the kind of care the thesis described.

I want to thank Beth de Swardt, a friend on the ground in Pretoria, who took my electronic files, put them into the required paper form, and delivered them to UNISA—twice.

I want to thank my wife, Lauren, for allowing me to give focused attention to this thesis and helping me in countless ways.

I want to thank my UNISA thesis committee. While their required revisions of my work meant delays in completion, the examiners forced me to produce a better thesis and I am grateful for their corrections and recommendations.

I especially want to thank my supervisor, Professor Adrio König, for his skill in guiding and challenging me to think, his speedy responses to my emails, and his constant kindness, patience, and encouragement. His fine reputation preceded him and proved to be well deserved.

Introduction

This thesis addresses what the New Testament writings teach about the mutual care that church members showed or were exhorted to show to one another. The problem I will address is the lack of emphasis in standard evangelical systematic theology manuals on this theme of mutual care and the need for a more thorough biblical-theological study of this subject.

My aim is both to demonstrate this lack of emphasis and to provide a researched exploration of seventeen specific ministries of mutual Christian care. In doing so I will show the importance of household churches as the setting where mutual care would most naturally be expressed. We will also consider three of the many New Testament images of the church that would make mutual care most likely. We will also demonstrate the way in which the redemptive work of God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—empowers and motivates the expression of mutual care.

My research approach will involve a qualitative study of the New Testament. I will look at both the narrative portions that describe the one-another ministries of Christians and the didactic portions that prescribe those ministries. I will argue that the New Testament writers described and envisioned the community life of local churches to be God’s designed setting for mutual Christian care and that the writers urged church members to be God’s agents for demonstrating that care. By highlighting and exploring the theme of mutual care I wish to present a clearer picture of what the New Testament churches looked like (the descriptive perspective) or should look like (the prescriptive perspective) in terms of the care of members by members.

The thesis title, “A Biblical-Theological Study of the New Testament Church as God’s Designed Agent and Setting for the Ministry of Mutual Christian Care,” could also be stated in the plural, “A Biblical-Theological Study of the New Testament Churches as God’s Designed Agents and Settings . . . ,” especially given the centrality of New Testament local churches and household churches.

Key terms in the title require definition. I am using a broad definition of “care” that involves provision for the welfare of both the spiritual and physical needs of church members—the person’s inner and outer dimensions. People are psychosomatic beings and mutual ministry entails caring for the whole person. By the adjectives “mutual” and “Christian,” I refer to the ministry by Christians—individually as brothers and sisters or

in concert together—to each other, done in ways befitting Christian behaviour and ministry.

Two delimitations should be noted. First, my focus will be on the “one another” ministry of members—laypeople—not the specialized ministry of elders, overseers, pastors, deacons, etc. I have deliberately bypassed any focus on their duties, except in referencing their task of equipping the members to do their ministries of mutual member care. At the same time, since the one-another ministries we will explore are given to all believers, church leaders would not be exempt from the New Testament call to these ministries.

Second, I have limited my scope of study primarily to the New Testament documents, not the extra-biblical literature of the day, and specifically to those New Testament documents that describe or address the post-ascension local church, i.e., Acts and the epistles. There are places, however, where I draw on the Gospels, especially the teaching of Jesus, to provide background or to shed light on the primary passages that I will examine in Acts and the epistles.

Methodologically, the thesis will primarily concentrate on the New Testament writings themselves. I have surveyed inductively the many New Testament passages—the narrative accounts in Acts and the exhortations in the epistles—that describe and prescribe the ministry of mutual Christian care in the churches. Here I will depend on New Testament scholars, especially modern scholarly commentaries, for exegetical insight. From this biblical research, I will draw theological observations and conclusions. Along the way, I will consult the works of ecclesiological theologians, as well as, to some extent, historians, sociologists, and archaeologists in chapter two where we discuss the actual meeting places of New Testament Christians.

In chapter one, we begin with a brief overview of the New Testament’s mutual care teaching. We will note five broad categories (words, example, deeds, prayer, presence) of mutual ministry and then fourteen specific one-another commands, along with specific Scripture citations for each. Our purpose at this point will not be to provide a detailed study but simply to show the large emphasis that the New Testament, especially the epistles, places on these materials. The theme of mutual Christian care is a mega-theme in the New Testament.

By contrast, however, we will then review the systematic theology manuals of twenty-five well-regarded conservative theologians, each with a very high commitment to the Bible’s authority, from various denominations. This review will demonstrate how

little attention these writers give to these major New Testament themes in the ecclesiology sections of their manuals. We will not include monographs on ecclesiology that might discuss mutual ministry themes more explicitly. I found that the relative dearth of discussion on this topic to be both surprising and discouraging. This chapter will therefore function as an apologetic for me pursuing this thesis topic. Standard systematic theologies have largely ignored this dominant New Testament theme. On this note, I will also respond to the objection that the topic of mutual care belongs to the discipline of practical theology and not systematic theology.

In chapter two, we will examine the nature of the New Testament church, noting again the lack of emphasis on mutual care in the descriptions and standard definitions of the church. We will look at four ways the New Testament documents use the term “church,” with a special emphasis on the citywide and house churches as those actual settings where mutual care did and can occur. To complete the ecclesiological overview we will consider several New Testament metaphors—the body of Christ, the family of God, and God’s new priesthood—that shaped the identity of the local church as God’s setting and instrument for mutual ministry.

In chapter three, we will look at the ultimate foundation of all New Testament one-another ministry, the salvation work of the triune God. We will explore how God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit provide both models and motives for church members, as recipients of God’s redemptive work, to minister to each other. We will see especially how God’s love in Christ, Christ’s self-sacrificial death on the cross, and the Spirit’s relational graces (e.g., the “fruit” of the Spirit) and ministry gifts guide and empower church members in caring for each other. An Appendix will collate the main New Testament passages on spiritual gifts and list each gift.

Finally, in chapter four, we will explore the many, varied ways that the New Testament describes and prescribes seventeen specific ministries of mutual Christian care. I will divide these specific ministries into three categories—attitudes, actions, and words—and we will see how each individual ministry demonstrates particular aspects of care for the spiritual and physical needs of one’s fellow church members. My hope is that the results of this research will have the cumulative effect of showing how central the mutual ministries of church members are in the New Testament and in the life, growth, and health of its churches.

The English Bible version I have used consistently throughout the thesis is *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), now

referred to in the publishing and academic world simply as the “NIV” or sometimes the “updated NIV” or “NIV2011.” It has replaced both the 1984 NIV and the 2005 *Today’s New International Version* (TNIV). The Greek New Testament text I am using is *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)*, edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopolous, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), also known as the UBS4 of the United Bible Societies. For Bible book abbreviations, except in quotes from others that I have not altered, I am following standards of the Society of Biblical Literature.

Chapter One

The Ministry of Mutual Christian Care:

A New Testament Church Theme Neglected in Systematic Theology

When we read the New Testament, especially the narrative portrayals of the local churches in Acts and the exhortations in the epistles written to various local churches, we see a recurrent theme: church members care for, or are called to care for, each other. We find dozens and dozens of passages that describe or prescribe the many ministries of mutual Christian care in the local churches. The book of Acts records snapshots of the church community as God's designed setting for mutual Christian care, and its members as agents for demonstrating that care. The New Testament letters envision and urge the same. New Testament Christianity is relational Christianity.

1.1 An Overview of the New Testament Emphasis on Mutual Christian Care

While we will unpack many of these ministries in greater detail in chapter four, we will first consider three initial summaries of the emphasis that we see in the New Testament on mutual, one-another, member-to-member care. While there are applications to church leaders (since they are also Christians and church members), each summary below describes the one-another ministry of individual believers, not elders and deacons per se.

1.1.1 Five Ways God's People Minister to One Another

First, we will overview five broad avenues by which Christians minister to one another. For each avenue, to show the New Testament emphasis on mutual care, I have cited representative passages that demonstrate that ministry of care.

1.1.1.1 By their words. This broad category could include, of course, formal preaching and teaching by church leaders. But it also includes the songs Christians sing to God and one another in worship gatherings (Eph 5:19–20; Col 3:16) and the many informal, member-to-member, Christ-centred conversations (Eph 4:15; Heb 3:12–13) that happen in small group gatherings and individually in church building hallways, in homes, and by phone, email, and text messaging throughout the week.

1.1.1.2 By their example. Church members draw hope and encouragement from seeing fellow believers walk by faith. While Paul frequently sees himself as a model (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17a), he and other New Testament writer view other leaders (Heb 13:7) and other believers (Phil 3:17b; Heb 6:12) as providing exemplary faith and obedience for their readers to follow.

1.1.1.3 By their deeds. The New Testament records and applauds the demonstration of various forms of practical hands-on help. Members of the body of Christ as individuals (Acts 9:36; Gal 6:10) and together (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35; Titus 3:8, 13–14; Heb 6:10) help each another in tangible ways.

1.1.1.4 By their prayers. Several passages show the efficacy of prayer and the ways God answers prayer (2 Cor 1:10–11; Phil 1:18–19; Jas 5:14–16), all in the context of helping each other. For Paul, prayer had a horizontal, mutual ministry outcome, not merely as an act of vertical worship or personal submission.

1.1.1.5 By their presence. As important as wise words, consistent modelling, kind actions, and persistent prayers are, the New Testament also commends the simple, sympathetic presence of other brothers and sisters in Christ as a way to help others (Rom 12:15). Paul himself expresses his desire for his dear friends Titus and Timothy to be with him (2 Cor 2:12–13; 7:6; 2 Tim 4:9).

1.1.2 The “One Another” Passages

A second way to see the New Testament’s emphasis on mutual, member-to-member care is by surveying the plethora of passages that contain the phrase, “one another.” The Bible frequently directs Christian fellowship and mutual ministry with these one-another commands—imperatives¹ addressed to believers that often include some form of the Greek reflexive pronoun ἀλλήλων that carries the reciprocal sense of “each other, one another, or mutually” (Arndt, Danker & Bauer 2000:46; Louw & Nida 1996:815). Sometimes the same mutual ministry emphasis appears in imperatives with some form of the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτῶν, another “marker of reciprocal relationship”

¹ While most of the Bible passages that we will consider are in the imperative mood, I am also including implied commands, i.e., places where the writer affirms a specific action or attitude that is clearly something he wants his readers to do or not do.

synonymous with the “each other, one another” sense of ἀλλήλων (Arndt *et al.* 2000:268–269). Still other passages lack these two common reflexive pronouns but use other one-another terminology or show in their context a call to mutual, reciprocal ministry. We have included fourteen one-another commands below, although it is possible to subdivide some or combine others in different ways.

1.1.2.1 Two foundational observations. Before exploring these commands, we should consider two foundational observations. First, each of them is addressed to the church as a whole, to be done by every member (although some will be more gifted than others in various functions). They do not appear in the epistles written to individuals (e.g., the Pastoral Epistles or Philemon). They are not directed to the leaders and they are not given to the church for the leaders to perform. These are mutual ministries that members should carry out toward each other.

For example, the most common “one another” term, ἀλλήλων and its cognates, appears fifty-eight times in the epistles. Of these, fifty-two refer to proper Christian relationships,² with one referring to Paul’s relationship with the Roman church (Rom 1:12) and the remaining fifty-one referring to the mutual relationships between church members.³ H. Kramer (1990:63) observes, “The understanding of ἀλλήλων in the NT is unproblematic; the translation *each other* or *mutually* is sufficient for every instance.” He explains several exceptions, none involving our concern over church member relationships with each other. Kramer (1990:63) then concludes,

Otherwise ἀλλήλων is used in connection with groups of persons who are in some way peers and with reference to relationships within a homogeneous group in order to express communication with or, sometimes, negative conduct toward, each other. (It never refers to the relationship of Jesus to his disciples or of

² The other six include the sinful behaviour of non-Christians toward each other (Rom 1:27; Titus 3:3), the conflicting thoughts (Rom 2:15) and spiritual natures within individuals (Gal 5:17), and two apocalyptic passages describing the behaviour of non-Christians (Rev 6:4; 11:10).

³ The verses are Rom 12:5, 10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:5, 7, 14; 16:16; 1 Cor 7:5; 11:33; 12:25; 16:20; 2 Col 13:12; Gal 5:13, 15, 26; 6:2; Eph 4:2, 25, 32; 5:21; Phil 2:3; Col 3:9, 13; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9, 18; 5:11, 15; 2 Thess 1:3; Heb 10:24; Jas 4:11; 5:9, 16; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:9; 5:5, 14; 1 John 1:7; 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5. While several of these also include showing love or kindness to both one another *and* to others (1Thess 3:12; 5:15), even in those contexts the emphasis remains on the members’ relationships with each other. This is in keeping with Paul’s teaching in passages like Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers,” where the “especially” (Greek *malista*) captures Paul’s priorities found in the ἀλλήλων verses above. See also Kramer (1990:63)

Christ to his people; on the other hand, and significantly, it is used with reference to Paul and the Church in Rom 1:12).

Kramer's last comment seems significant. The one-other commands are between members and members, not between Jesus and members, leaders and leaders, or leaders and members (although one could argue that leaders also need to see themselves as members labouring among their fellow members). Yet even in Romans 1:12, while Paul is conscious of his apostolic role in verse 11, he emphasizes mutual ministry, "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."

The second foundational theological observation to make is that the one-another commands arise from the church's one-another identity. Because of the saving work of God in Christ, believers in Christ belong to one another. "For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:4–5). 1 Corinthians 12 develops this same "one body, many members" imagery, culminating in Paul's declaration, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor 12:27).

In other words, we must begin with a *fact*, not a command; with what *is*, not what should be: Christians *are* members of one another. As believers in Jesus, the readers of the New Testament already belong to each other. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus, God has inseparably joined them to him and to one another. The apostle John declares that he and his Christian readers have fellowship with each other because they together have fellowship with God the Father and God the Son. "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3; cf. 1:7).

Stated differently, these passages suggest that a study of the church's ministry functions proceeds best from an understanding of its essential identity—that ontology (who the church is) undergirds functionality (what the church should do). Several recent ecclesiological writers have captured this dynamic in their understanding of the church. In *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (2006:21–24), Simon Chan views the church in ontological terms more than in functional, instrumental terms. The church does not exist to carry out God's ultimate goal; the church is God's ultimate goal. "The church does not exist in order to fix a broken creation; rather, creation exists to realize the church." The church existed in God's mind as God's final purpose even

before the creation of the world. Chan then draws out the implication we noted above: the church's "basic identity is to be found not in what it *does* but in what it *is*."

Similarly, in *The House Where God Lives: Renewing the Doctrine of the Church for Today* (2009:1–26), Gary D. Badcock interacts with those like Nicholas M. Healy⁴ and John Shelby Spong⁵ who build their ecclesiologies on the interaction of the church with the human social conditions it faces and seeks to remedy. Instead, Badcock (2009:25) argues that

in order for us to develop an adequate ecclesiology, we must begin not with the human creature, but with God. . . . The doctrine of the church is rooted in God's gracious outreach to the world. . . . It is a product of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, and of God's continuing activity in "indwelling" the creature in the specific and special ways that are denoted when we talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The church is fundamentally the people of God. Finally, in *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (2012:50–52), Gregg R. Allison summarizes three basic methodological approaches to ecclesiology—functional (the church's activities, roles, ministries), teleological (the church's purpose), and ontological (the church's attributes, characteristics) perspectives. He prefers the latter approach, correctly showing that the church's functions properly flow from the church's nature as God's people.

The church's ontological identity as the people of God, formed and indwelt by God's Spirit, provides the foundation for mutual care. The fact that Christians are members of one another, joined together by God the builder of his church, forms the biblical basis for right thoughts and actions toward one another. As in other aspects of Christian theology, what "already is" becomes the basis for what "ought to be."

This one-body reality becomes an explicit argument for ethical behaviour in several Pauline passages. For example, Paul's extended one-body argument in 1 Corinthians 12 includes an obvious implication:

On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern

⁴ Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁵ John Shelby Spong, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. (1 Cor 12:22–26)

Because believers *are* co-members of the same body, each part “*should* have equal concern for each other” (emphasis added).

In Ephesians 4:2–3 Paul call the readers to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” and to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” Why? He gives two reasons. First, the readers together have received God’s grace. They have experienced the life-changing reality of salvation in verse 1, “the calling you have received.” Second, the triune God has formed the church members into a united, one-body relationship—note the seven “one’s”—in verses 4–6, “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.” We see the same dynamic in verse 25, where the apostle exhorts each of his readers to “put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour.” Why? Because “we are all members of one body.” The fact of their oneness forms a basis for their care for one another. The same dynamic also appears in Ephesians 2:11–22; 3:6: and 5:28–30.

1.1.2.2 Specific one-another commands. We turn now to the specific one-another commands. What attitudes and actions should mark believers in Jesus in relationship to others? While we will examine several of them more intensely in later chapters, our purpose at this point in this chapter is simply to show how widespread is the New Testament’s emphasis on mutual Christian care.

1. Love one another. The supreme Christian duty toward others, rooted deeply in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Lev 19:18) and repeated frequently by Jesus (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17) and his apostles Paul (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:13–14; Eph 5:1–2; 1 Thes 3:12; 4:9–10; 2 Thess 1:3), James (Jas 2:8), Peter (1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 2 Pet 1:5–7), and John (1 John 2:10; 3:10–11; 4:7, 11–12, 20–21; 2 John 5–6), along with the unnamed writer to the Hebrews (Heb 10:24; 13:1), is to love one another. No one-another command recurs as often or gets magnified so intensely throughout the Bible. It summarizes all practical righteousness and completely fulfils God’s law toward others in both covenants—the old (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:13–14; Jas 2:8) and the new (John 15:34–35), with special emphasis in the epistles above on loving one’s fellow believers.

2. Build Up (or Edify) One Another. This command is a frequent theme in Paul and includes both individual (Rom 14:19; 15:1–3; Eph 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11) and corporate (1 Cor 8:1; 12:7; 14:12, 26; 2 Cor 12:19; Eph 4:11–12) aspects of Christian growth and maturity. It is a general term, involving more specific action steps (seen in the context of many passages) to produce the goal of edification.

What, if any, is the link between loving one another and building up one another? Consider two of Paul's letters. The 1 Corinthians 8:1 text above shows an explicit connection: "Love builds up." Looking at these passages in their larger contexts, Paul's concentrated call to love in 1 Corinthians 13 is sandwiched between his call to edify the church in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14. In other words, the Spirit's gifts that are given "for the common good" (12:7) must be exercised in love (12:31b–13:13) so that the church can be built up (14:3–5, 26). We see a similar link in Ephesians 4:11–16, where the goals of edification (v. 12, 16) and maturation (v. 13, 15) are realized as members speak God's gospel truth "in love" (v. 15). In 4:29, they employ edifying speech, reflecting God's love for them (Eph 1–2; 5:1–2) and their love for each other (4:2), and fulfilling Paul's prayer that they would know and experience the extent of God's love (Eph 3:14–21). As Peter O'Brien (1999:354) observes, "The second half of Ephesians (chaps. 4–6) contains a series of instructions to love (4:2, 15, 16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:24; see on 4:15), the fulfilment of which is the outworking of the apostle's prayer (3:17, 19)." Loving others finds its goal and application in building up others. (Note: In chapter three we will explore further how loving one another involves seeking to build up one another in Christian faith and maturity, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.)

3. Serve one another. Like loving one another and building up one another, this command suggests a more general duty that members can fulfil in various ways. It is a guiding verb in 1 Peter 4:10 for the way believers should exercise their gifts: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." As we will see in chapter 3, the Spirit's purpose in giving the church spiritual gifts is to serve one another. Paul makes a similar point as he introduces the topic of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:5, "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord." The role of pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:12 is "to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Two other passages highlight the importance of serving. First, Jesus's words in Mark 10:45, likely known by his contemporary and subsequent apostles in light of its

repetition in other Gospel accounts (Matt 20:28), present himself as the Servant par excellence. The context is important. James and John had brashly asked for positions of high honour above their fellow disciples, in Jesus's coming kingdom, and Jesus dealt with them squarely (Mark 10:35–40). Mark continues,

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:41–45)

The Lord not only links himself prophetically and messianically as the fulfilment of the Isaiah Servant passages (Lane 1974:383–385; France 2002: 419–421; Evans 2001: 119–125), but also presents himself as a practical model of self-giving service for his self-seeking disciples. Unlike Gentile rulers, radical servanthood toward one another must mark Jesus's followers. His own self-sacrifice on the cross remains the ultimate example for them to emulate.

Second, in a central passage about Christian living in the New Covenant age, Paul tightly connects loving one another with serving one another, contrasting both of them with the self-centred fleshly indulgence that produces biting, devouring, and destroying each other.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (Gal 5:13–15)

For the apostle, the command to love issues forth in service. Douglas Moo (2013:345) observes,

Two words that are important indicators of the direction this section takes are used here in 5:13: “love” (5:14, 22; conceptually elsewhere) and “one another” (vv. 15 [2x], 17, 26 [2x]; 6:2; nowhere else in Galatians). Love demands a reciprocal concern for others in the community that the pronoun ἀλλήλοις brings out. The διά that governs ἀγάπης is usually translated and interpreted as instrumental (“through” in most English versions). But “love” is not so much the means through which we serve others as the motivation for the service. . . . Love is both the reason why we serve others and the manner in which we serve others.

Love for a brother or sister produces service toward them.

People rightly view the letter to the Galatians as a firm declaration of the doctrine of justification by faith and as a clarion call to Christian liberty from Mosaic Law. Yet it is no less a powerful appeal from the apostle to love and serve one another in light of the gospel freedom that the Christian readers have found in their Redeemer. In the same way that the greatest command toward one another—love—seeks to build up (above), so love also seeks to serve one another.

From the foundational reality of church members belonging to one another and their chief duty of loving-one-another-by-building-up-one-another and loving-one-another-by-serving-one-another, we proceed to the particular duties of Christian fellowship. While not exhaustive,⁶ the remaining items in our list include specific duties that reflect the generic duties of loving one another. In other words, one can argue, based on the way Jesus (Matt 12:37–40; Mark 12:29–31), Paul (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14), and James (Jas 2:8) viewed the love-your-neighbour command, that this command summarizes all other duties that Christians should carry out toward one another.

4. Accept one another. In Romans 14:1–15:7, Paul addresses tensions between members of the church who have differing convictions on matters that Paul deems to be secondary. Some were stronger in their conscience and some were weaker but both were in danger of judging one another. He calls both sides not to judge one another but to learn to accept one another because of the commonality they have as those who together belong to Jesus Christ. He closes the unit with a powerful appeal, “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God” (Rom 15:7). The ground for such acceptance of others is the gospel, Christ’s acceptance of them by grace. The members should welcome and receive into their fellowship anyone whom Jesus has accepted into his family of believers. Despite their many differences, they should treat each other as brothers and sisters. (Note: Paul also addresses a similar situation in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.)

⁶ I am not including one-another passages that are restricted to marriage (e.g., 1 Cor 7:5), since my focus is on the mutual care opportunities of every church member, not just married partners in their sexual relationship. For the same reason, I am not addressing specific exceptional situations that most church members do not face (e.g., the prohibition in 1 Cor 6:7 against church members suing one another in civil court). Furthermore, while in chapter three I will address Jesus’s act of washing his disciples in John 13 as an example of humble service, for reasons to be discussed there I am not viewing foot washing as a continuing, universally-recognized ordinance of the historic Christian church.

5. Don't judge one another. The flipside of accepting one another is not to judge one another. The New Testament urges believers to avoid the sharp negative judgments arising from a spirit of self-righteousness, hypocrisy, incomplete understanding, and lack of love that once marked them. Paul described that past life of himself and his readers with chilling words, “We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). Paul calls believers to not judge their brothers and sisters because the Lord is the ultimate judge of his servants (Rom 14:4, 10–13) and he will judge them when he returns (1 Cor 4:5). James also rebukes the judgmental favoritism that elevates the rich over the poor, contrary to God’s standards (Jas 2:1–5), the slander that places his readers in the role of God the Judge (4:11–12), and impatient grumbling against each other, reminding them that their Judge and Vindicator will come soon (5:8–9).

6. Greet one another. The New Testament epistle writers encourage their readers to greet one another in warm, affectionate, personal ways, with a holy kiss (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12) or a kiss of love (1 Pet 5:14). They also convey to their readers their own greetings (Rom 16:3–15; 1 Cor 16:21; Phil 4:21; Col 4:15; Titus 3:15; Heb 13:24; 3 John 14) and greetings to their readers from other believers (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:19–20; 2 Cor 13:13; Phil 4:21–22; Col 4:10–15; Titus 3:15; Phlm 23–24; Heb 13:24; 2 Pet 5:13; 2 John 13; 3 John 14).

7. Be same-minded with one another. We could consider at least eleven synonymous passages under this heading. Some are descriptive of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. . . .”) and some are direct, concise, and proverb-like (1 Pet 3:8, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded. . . .”; 2 Cor 13:11). Most not only picture unity of mind in terms of agreement and shared Christian convictions but also carry in their context an element of humility. For example, Romans 12:16 connects harmony with the ability to humbly associate with people of lowly position, in contrast to the kind of pride that looks down on and distances oneself from such people. Furthermore, we can couple 1 Corinthians 1:10 and Philippians 2:2 with humility and a Christ-like spirit. In this category we could also consider verses that oppose falsehood and lies (Eph 4:25; Col 3:9), since these are injurious to same-mindedness and contrary to church unity. (In that sense, they overlap with the next category.) Other passages stress the importance of unity and like-mindedness for worship (Rom 15:5–6), gospel witness (Phil 1:27; 4:2), and serving one another (Phil 2:2).

8. Be humble toward one another and prefer one another. While we could consider these two duties separately, their similarity and overlap warrants a combined reflection. The Bible calls believers to prefer one another—to regard other church members as more important than themselves and to place the interests and desires of above their own. Paul calls believers to be devoted to one another and honour one another (Rom 12:10), to value other people above themselves and place the interests of others above their own (Phil 2:3–4), and to submit to one another (Eph 5:21). Peter reminds his younger readers to submit themselves to their elders and all of his readers to humble themselves before each other (1 Pet 5:5).

9. Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. This compound one-another command appears explicitly in James 5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

10. Bear with, be patient with, and forgive one another. The apostles are realists, recognizing that church members will too frequently offend one another or simply be hard to live with in Christian community. Paul calls members to be patient and forbearing with each other (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13a), to get rid of all forms of anger and replace them with the same kind of forgiveness God showed them (Eph 4:31–32; Col 3:13b), and, in the midst of various ministry actions toward various types of church members, to be patient and non-retaliatory with each other (1 Thess 5:14–15).

11. Teach, admonish, and encourage one another. Here we include various ways that members should speak God’s gospel truth to one another in both positive instructive ways and negative admonitory ways. For Paul, believers are competent to instruct one another (Rom 15:14) and should speak gospel truth to one another (Eph 4:15); should speak, teach, and admonish one another in song (Eph 5:18–19; Col 3:16); should warn, encourage, or help others, depending on the recipient’s condition (1 Thess 5:14–15; 2 Thess 3:15). Similarly, the writer of Hebrews warns readers of the dangers of apostasy and calls them to encourage/admonish each other to deal with their sin (Heb 3:12–13) and to persevere in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24–26).

12. Bear the spiritual burdens of one another. Bearing spiritual burdens includes bearing with those fellow believers with weak consciences (Rom 15:1) and seeking to restore a fellow member trapped in sin, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal 6:1–2).

13. Live in peace with one another. Believers have already been united into one body by God’s Spirit and they are now called to guard that unity and pursue functioning, relational peace with their fellow members. As much as they can, they must seek to live at peace with others (Rom 12:18; 1 Thess 5:13b), to make every effort to do so (Rom 14:19; Eph 4:3), and to pursue relational peace with others, along with others who are called to do the same (1 Tim 2:22).

14. Be hospitable and provide for the financial needs of one another. Hospitality includes providing for fellow believers, especially traveling Christians and Christian ministers. They accomplish it by opening their homes to one another and providing for the physical, temporal needs of others. We see examples of this among the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35; 6:1–4) and in Paul’s example (Acts 20:35). And we read the exhortations toward hospitality from four different Scripture writers (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:1–2; 1 Pet 4:9; 3 John 5–8).

1.1.3 A Positive Summative Example from One Systematic Theologian

As we conclude this overview, in addition to the five general categories and the fourteen one-another themes, we will consider a portion of one systematic theology handbook that unlike most (as we will see below) captures many of the above mutual care emphases. In his chapter on the “Church,” Mark Dever (2007:793–794) briefly summarizes the New Testament commands for members to love, care for, and serve one another. It is a long list, complete with his plenteous biblical references, but one that will illustrate the breadth of biblical teaching on the subject and provide a contrast to what we will subsequently see when we look at other systematic theologians.

The duties and responsibilities church members have toward one another summarize the life of the new society that is the church. As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians are obliged to love one another (John 13:34–35; also John 15:12–17; Rom. 12:9–10; 13:8–10; Gal. 5:15; 6:10; Eph. 1:15; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:7–12; cf. Ps. 133). Christians are members of one family, even of one another (1 Cor. 12:13–27). Without a life of love for one another, what other duty of church members is satisfying or worthwhile? . . . By this love, the nature of the gospel itself is demonstrated.

Church members are also obliged to seek peace and unity within their congregation (Rom. 12:16; also Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 13:7; 2 Cor. 12:20; Eph. 4:3–6; Phil. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:11; James 3:18; 4:11). The desire for peace and unity should follow naturally from the obligation to love (Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:10–11; Eph. 4:5,13; Phil. 2:2; cf. Zeph. 3:9). Further, if Christians share the same spirit and mind—the Spirit of Christ—then unity is a natural expression of that Spirit. Given the sin that remains in believers in this life,

however, unity often requires effort. Thus Christians “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). Strife should be avoided (Prov 17:14; Matt 5:9; 1 Cor 10:32; 11:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:1–3).

Love is expressed and unity is cultivated when church members actively sympathize with one another. As Paul exhorted the congregation in Rome, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (Rom. 12:15; cf. Job 2:11; Isa 63:9; 1 Cor 12:26; Gal. 6:2; 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 4:15; 12:3). Other duties follow: to care for one another physically and spiritually (Matt. 25:40; John 12:8; Acts 15:36; Rom 12:13; 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1–2; Gal 2:10; 6:10; Heb 13:16; James 1:27; 1 John 3:17; cf. Deut 15:7–8,11); to watch over and hold one another accountable (Rom 15:14; Gal 6:1–2; Phil 2:3–4; 2 Thess 3:15; Heb 12:15; cf. Lev 19:17; Ps 141:5; to work to edify one another (1 Cor 14:12–26; Eph 2:21–22; 4:12–29; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Pet 4:10; 2 Pet 3:18); to bear with one another (Matt 18:21–22; Mark 11:25; Rom 15:1; Gal 6:2; Col 3:12; including not suing one another, 1 Cor 6:1–7); to pray for one another (Eph 6:18; James 5:16); to keep away from those who would destroy the church (Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 6:3–5; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10–11); to reject evaluating people by worldly standards (Matt 20:26–27; Rom 12:10–16; Jas 2:1–13); to contend together for the gospel (Phil 1:27; Jude 3); and to be examples to one another (Phil 2:1–18).

While church members also have particular responsibilities toward church leaders and those outside the church, Dever’s above paragraphs pertain only to their ministry to each other. They persuasively show that Christians ministering to each other within their church is a major New Testament theme.

1.2 The Relative Dearth of Discussion of Mutual Care in Systematic Theology Manuals

Given the New Testament’s emphasis on mutual care and ministry by local church members, we might expect that systematic theology manuals would summarize these themes. Unfortunately, this is not so. There is a glaring lack of stress on these themes within published dogmatics. Even the Dever example above merely lists verses without explaining, expanding on, or nuancing them. Moreover, Dever’s entry is part of a multi-author work, where perhaps his special concerns as a pastor more than as a systematic theologian have emerged.

Before we proceed, we must address an objection that might be raised, namely, that the discipline of practical theology, not systematic theology, is the proper discipline to treat the ecclesiological subject of mutual care. An objector might suggest that we are unfairly expecting systematic theology manuals to cover ground that they need not cover or historically have not covered.

Two responses seem in order. First, the objection depends on how one defines terms like “systematic theology” and “practical theology.” For example, John Frame (2013:9) asserts that systematic theology asks what the Bible as a whole teaches about any subject (e.g., adding together what David, Jesus, and Paul say about forgiveness) and what we today should believe about that topic. In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem (1994:21–23) concurs, concluding that systematic theology asks, “what the whole Bible teaches us today.” On the other hand, for Frame, practical theology is a department of systematic theology that asks a specific question: “how should we *communicate* the Word of God?” Here Frame includes practical activities like teaching, evangelism, and media communications.

Based on such a distinction, where should we expect the New Testament’s teaching on the one-another passages and related aspects of mutual care to be addressed? While the details of *how* one actually greets someone or shares a material possession or offers an encouraging word would lie in the domain of practical theology, the fact *that* the New Testament commands these activities and *what* the various New Testament writers teach about that particular topic seems to lie within the proper domain of systematic theology.

Second, the various systematic theology manuals we will survey below that do address the field of ecclesiology do include many topics that one could view as practical, e.g., the duties of church leaders, the steps of church discipline, how should baptism be done, and the mission of the church. But they say little about the duties of members to each other. To list the many, varied activities of mutual care that the New Testament texts teach, to explain what they mean, and to synthesize the emphases of the various writers seems to be a legitimate task for a systematic theologian.

In the following pages, we will consider twenty-five systematic theology manuals. The list is not exhaustive but representative, and fairly comprehensive within certain selected boundaries. I have limited my focus to conservative, English-speaking, evangelical Protestant theologians in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries (and one late-eighteenth century writer). They span various denominations.

1.2.1 Donald Bloesch and Dietrich Bonhoeffer

We begin with Donald Bloesch who not only exemplifies this dearth but provides some guiding thoughts as we consider the subsequent writers. In *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission*, like many other theologians below, Bloesch

summarizes the four historic marks of the church—unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. He then describes what he calls the “practical” marks of the church, those indicators of how the church visibly demonstrates its faith and witness to the wider society. The Reformers included the pure preaching of God’s Word and the right administration of the sacraments. While all of them recognized the importance of church discipline, they differed with one another on whether it should rise to the level of being a third mark of the church (Bloesch 2002:99–105).

What about mutual care and ministry? Bloesch credits Pietism with holding forth “the fellowship of love” as a mark of the church, including the visible fruits of Christian living by the laity. He (2002:106) then acknowledges Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on community—the concerns of our thesis:

Part of the genius of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was his discernment that community belongs to the salient marks of the church. Here we see an affinity to the Pietist emphasis on fellowship, except that Bonhoeffer means more than living in a relationship of love. He has in mind the readiness to share both goods and time with people in need, especially those who belong to the household of faith.

While Bloesch seems overly selective in ignoring many ecclesial traditions that stressed community and mutual care prior to Bonhoeffer,⁷ the fact that an esteemed scholar like Bloesch can make such a claim indicates the underdevelopment of the rich biblical themes of mutual care and one-another ministry. Thankfully, Bloesch himself sees the value of the mark of “fellowship of love” and includes it in his list of essential marks along with oneness, catholicity, apostolicity, holiness, preaching and hearing the Word, and the practice of prayer, bypassing even the sacraments, creeds, and confessions (2002:108). Unfortunately, however, Bloesch devotes only a single paragraph of description to this mark in the chapter on the church’s role in the plan of salvation. We gain from him little biblical-theological understanding of what community, body life, mutual care, or one-another ministry looks like in the life of a church (2002:63–64).

1.2.2 Dutch Reformed Theologians

We see this deficiency within some writers within the Dutch Reformed tradition. In *The Glorious Body of Christ*, R. B. Kuiper asserts that the church has a dual responsibility to those within the church and those outside, and illustrates and warns of

⁷ William B. Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21st Century* (1995:115–121), cites evidences of mutual care concerns or practices (albeit sometimes in small groups, not necessarily always in separate churches) in Martin Luther, Philip Jakob Spener, John Wesley, and George Whitefield.

imbalances that can come when churches neglect either responsibility. What is the responsibility to those within the church? Kuiper (1967:158–160) answers: it is simply to preach and teach. Yet Kuiper says little about what that ministry looks like. In his next chapter, “The Supreme Task of the Church,” Kuiper (1967:163) expands on his point. “The church’s task is to teach and preach the Word of God. Whatever else it may properly do is subordinate and subsidiary to that task. This is its supreme task.” Kuiper then argues that all other functions—legitimate and important—are subsidiary to this preaching and teaching task. This would include, for example, the poor.

“But this task, too, is subordinate to the preaching of the Word. That is indicated by what the apostles told the church at Jerusalem when the office of deacon was about to be instituted. Said they: ‘It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables’ (Acts 6:2).” (1967:168)

But as we shall see later, Kuiper misunderstands the Acts 6 scene in several ways. First, while the *apostle’s* supreme task here may be to teach God’s Word, the *church’s* task of caring for its poorer members is not subordinate or subsidiary. Second, the apostles may have been involved already in some sense in the distribution of food prior to the Acts 6 disruption described in verse 1. (We at least know they were involved in distributing the proceeds from the land sales recorded in Acts 4:34–5:2).

G. C. Berkouwer shows more sensitivity to the New Testament teaching on the church’s mutual care and ministry. Like others who write about the church, Berkouwer organizes his ecclesiological study, *The Church*, along the lines of the four classic marks of the church—unity, catholicity, apostolicity, and holiness. In his chapter on fellowship (under the mark of unity) he refers to Paul’s body-and-member metaphor, including mutual sympathy. Berkouwer (1976:80–81, 93–95) also mentions the biblical themes of loving one another, mutual dependency, avoidance of conflict, and financial sharing with those in need. But beyond listing these matters, he does not explain or elaborate on them.

1.2.3 American Reformed Theologians

The same problem exists among Reformed theologians in America. Charles Hodge does not even include a section on ecclesiology in his massive 2260-page *Systematic Theology*. And there are no sections on the church in A. A. Hodge’s *Outlines of Theology*, William G. T. Shedd’s *Dogmatic Theology*, or Robert L. Dabney’s *Lectures in Systematic Theology*.

Why not? In his *Systematic Theology*, Louis Berkhof (1938:553) brings an insightful perspective on the place of ecclesiology in these writers.

It seems rather peculiar that practically all the outstanding Presbyterian dogmaticians of our country, such as the two Hodges, H. B. Smith, Shedd, and Dabney, have no separate locus on the Church in their dogmatical works and, in fact, devote very little attention to it. Only the works of Thornwell and Breckenridge form an exception to the rule. This might create the impression that, in their opinion, the doctrine of the Church should not have a place in dogmatics. But this is extremely unlikely, since none of them raise a single objection to its inclusion.

He continues by citing some particular reasons that specific theologians omitted ecclesiology from their manuals. Yet the net result is a glaring deficit.

Berkhof himself, however, does include a main section of 108 pages about the church and the sacraments. For example, he (1938:576) provides a lengthy discussion about the marks of the Church.

Reformed theologians differed as to the number of the marks of the Church. Some spoke of but one, the preaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel (Beza, Alsted, Amesius, Heidanus, Maresius); others, of two, the pure preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments (Calvin, Bullinger, Zanchius, Junius, Gomarus, Mastricht, à Marck) and still others added to these a third, the faithful exercise of discipline (Hyperius, Martyr, Ursinus, Trelcatius, Heidegger, Wendelinus).

Berkhof then discusses the distinction between marks necessary for the being of the church versus the well-being of the church. But in the end, Berkhof (1938:577) upholds the traditional three Reformed marks.

Now it is undoubtedly true that the three marks usually named are not really coordinate. Strictly speaking, it may be said that the true preaching of the Word and its recognition as the standard of doctrine and life, is the one mark of the Church. Without it there is no Church, and it determines the right administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of Church discipline. Nevertheless, the right administration of the sacraments is also a real mark of the Church. And though the exercise of discipline may not be peculiar to the Church, that is, is not found in it exclusively, yet it is absolutely essential to the purity of the Church.

In the next section he unpacks each of these three marks.

Yet in that section and throughout his entire teaching on ecclesiology, aside from teaching on church discipline, Berkhof says nothing significant about mutual ministry and care.

J. Oliver Buswell (1963:2:221–225) gives only brief treatment both to the church and to the ministries of mutual care in his nearly 1000-page manual, *A*

Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion. Because believers are members of one another, maintaining spiritual unity is required. Spiritual gifts should be exercised in light of the interdependence of the members of the church body. But beyond listing the spiritual gifts in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12; and Ephesians 4 (omitting 1 Pet 4), Buswell gives little specificity to any one-another ministry.

The recent work by three highly recognized American reformed evangelicals, Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Mark E. Dever, entitled *The Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic*, summarizes the nature of the church. But it does not discuss its mutual care ministry or one-another relationships.

Robert L. Reymond devotes 170 pages of his 1130-page systematic theology manual to the church, including twenty-four pages to the classic marks of oneness, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, and to what he sees as the three Reformation marks of the true proclamation of God's Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of church discipline. Yet in terms of the church's ministry to one another, he devotes only three pages to "The Duty to Minister to the Saints," largely consisting of block quotes of Scripture with little interaction or direction (1998:885–888), and a little more than one page to "The Duty to Perform Deeds of Benevolence and Mercy" (1998:892–893).

Michael Horton's recent 1051-page contribution, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (2011), devotes several chapters to the Church. Like most Reformed writers, he stresses the Reformation's three marks of God's Word, the sacraments, and discipline. Horton responds to a charge by one writer he cites, Darrell Gruder,⁸ that the Reformation's emphasis on "the marks of the church" tended to weaken its missional vocation

by focusing on the church as a place ("a place where certain things happen") rather than as the people ("a people who do certain things"). However, this undermines the very source of mission, namely, the priority of God's work over our work. In other words, if the church is not "a place where certain things happen" (i.e., preaching and sacrament), but is merely "a people who do certain things," then our works take precedence over God's works in salvation. The church becomes simply another group of moral, social, and political activists. However, precisely because the church is first of all the place where God does certain things, it becomes a people who belong to the new society that is being formed in this present evil age. By their acts of witness and deeds, they share the gifts they have been given with their neighbors. (2011:886–887)

⁸ Here Horton cites Darrell Gruder, *The Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 79–81.

But assuming that Horton does not misrepresent Gruder—does Gruder oppose the three marks or merely see them as too narrow or delimiting?—his response to Gruder raises several questions. Why should we assume that God’s grace only comes through the preached Word (note Horton’s use of “i.e.,” not “e.g.”), as opposed to the Word also being ministered by one member to another? Does God’s Spirit not empower God’s people to do godly things, making his people more than “simply another group of moral, social, and political activists?”

Horton (2011:888) continues his emphasis on the three marks as more important than mutual ministry and care.

While every member and every gift is needed in order for the body to be fully operative, the very life of the body depends on the faithful maintenance of the ministry of Word and sacrament. Not all members of the body can devote themselves exclusively to the Word and prayer, as Peter observed (Acts 6:2–7), but if some do not (especially out of a misguided assumption that every member is a minister), the sheep will not be fed and the body will not be built up into Christ. In fact, when the apostles were freed for this work by the appointment of deacons, we read, “So the word of God continued to increase” (Acts 6:7).

Horton seemingly distinguishes the marks of the church’s being and well-being, prioritizing the Word and sacrament in the first category and minimizing the one-another ministry. For example, was the growth of the church in Acts 2:47b directly tied to the priority of apostolic preaching or did it flow from the whole activity of the body life in 2:42–47a, including *both* apostolic teaching and the members’ mutual care? Furthermore, on what basis does he assume that the growth seen in Acts 6:7 is a direct result of the apostles being freed to preach and not of the entire work of the church? (In other words, had the Hebrew-Grecian crisis in verse 1 not been resolved, would God’s word have increased or would the church have split?)

Horton (2011:897) makes the same point about priorities when he adds the third mark of the Church, discipline.

A church may be lacking in hospitality, administration, giving, or service. While these wounds may certainly be serious, they are not deadly. However, the absence or corruption of God’s Word and sacraments blocks the delivery of heavenly gifts to the world. Therefore, discipline is essential for upholding these two marks. Christ does not gather his scattered sheep only to leave them susceptible to external and internal threats. Therefore, although the Word and the sacraments are the means of the church’s existence and sustenance in a way that cannot be said of any other characteristic, discipline may be properly called a mark of the church. Pastors feed, elders rule, and deacons service the saints in their temporal welfare.

Horton is consistent and offers a rationale for why these three marks are of greater importance than the one-another ministries of mutual care and edification. But Horton says nothing substantial about these ministries, ministries that occupy far more ground, at least in the New Testament letters, than the preached Word of pastors and the sacraments. It would be difficult to read the narratives in Acts (especially those passages that describe the actual daily life of the churches, e.g., in Acts 2, 4, 5, 6) and the instruction in the epistles and conclude that “Word and sacrament” are somehow *more* vital to the existence, health, and growth of the New Testament churches than the ministries of mutual care. As Buswell (1963:2:259) admits, “The New Testament is characterized by meagerness of detail in regard to both sacraments.”

1.2.4 Lutheran Theologians

We see the same underdeveloped ecclesiology among Lutheran scholars. John Theodore Mueller’s *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen* is a 1934 summary of Francis Pieper’s classic work on systematic theology. While Mueller makes one passing reference to the duties of believers that include mutual instruction and admonition (Col 3:16, 17), in the next paragraph he (1934:554–555) defines local churches as true believers who “are gathered at a certain place for the purpose of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments,” prioritizing those purposes. He later mentions the church gathering to “exercise the duties of Christian fellowship and love, 1 Cor 11:33; 1:10; Acts 6:1–6, Col 3:15, 16” and to “privately reprove an erring brother, Matt 18:15, 16” (1934:555). He distinguishes between the public ministry done by ordained pastors and the general ministry by all believers as they function as spiritual priests. But the latter’s ministry seems undeveloped by Mueller. While all believers should proclaim the gospel (1 Pet 2:9) and know and profess God’s truth (John 6:45; 7:38, 39; 1 Cor 2:15, 16; 1 John 2:27; 1 Pet 2:9; Col 3:16), the ministry of God’s Word remains the duty of the public minister (1 Tim 3:1–7; 5:22; Titus 1:5–11) (1934:564–565). Ironically, he cites Luther for this distinction, although Luther’s role for the believer-priest is much fuller than what Mueller (1934:566) cites:

As soon as we have become Christians through this Priest [Christ] and His priesthood and in Baptism through faith have been engrafted into Him, we have the right and authority to teach and confess the Word, which we have from Him, before everybody, every one according to his calling and station. For though we are not all in the public office or calling, still every Christian should teach, instruct, exhort, comfort, and reprove his neighbour through God’s Word

whenever and wherever any one is in need of it, as a father and mother must do with their children and servants and a brother, neighbour, citizen, or peasant with another. For a Christian can instruct and admonish another who is yet ignorant or weak in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc.; and whoever hears this is in duty bound to receive it from him as God's Word and to confess it publicly.

Mueller then goes on to cite Luther on the distinct role of the pastor but he does not develop the teaching ministry of "every Christian" that Luther mentions..

In his section on the Church in his theology manual, *A Summary of Christian Doctrine: a Popular Presentation of the Teachings of the Bible*, Lutheran scholar Edward Koehler (2006:315) notes that believers are "intimately joined to one another by the bond of a common faith, a common hope, and a mutual love." As members of Christ's priesthood, they offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5) that include praying for others (1 Tim 2:1–3); doing good and sharing (Heb 13:16); and forgiving those who sin against us (Matt 18:15–35; 2 Cor 2:4–11) (2006: 333). But beyond these brief references and some more developed teaching on brotherly discipline in a later chapter, Koehler says nothing about mutual Christian care.

Robert Kolb's (1993:248–250) *The Christian Faith: A Lutheran Exposition* is a briefer, more contemporary summary of Lutheran theology, including a significant section under the topic of Sanctification on Spiritual Gifts and wise counsel on Christian liberty—how to care for, love, and not offend weaker brothers (1 Cor 8) (1993:255–256). In his section on the Church, he notes that the believer's royal priesthood "involves the horizontal calling to share his word with others and live together with fellow believers in mutual love" (1993:258). In a later section, Kolb mentions several mutual care ministries—members edify each other, discipline each other, and show love by meeting the temporal needs of each other. But these are undeveloped and he presents no comprehensive summary of one-another duties (1993:264–266).

1.2.5 Methodist Theologians

What about the Wesleyan Methodist tradition? Consider John Miley's classic, two-volume *Systematic Theology*. Out of 1057 pages, Miley devotes only thirty-four to the doctrine of the church, including merely two paragraphs to mutual care and ministry under the category of fellowship as a means of grace (Miley 1894:2:389). He then refers to God's Word as a means of grace, but only to the private reading and study and the public preaching of the Word, not to any one-another ministry.

In his section on the Church in his three-volume *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, Methodist theologian William Burt Pope recognizes that New Testament church members have become a universal priesthood. Anointed by the Lord (1 John 2:20), they offer spiritual sacrifices and perform religious service (Jas 1:26–27; Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5). Pope (1879:336) specifies “their devotions and alms deeds and good works being their priestly oblations” but says nothing about any mutual ministries of care or cites any one-another passages. He mentions a few of these a little earlier as part of his discussion of salvation under the subheadings of “Law and Love” (1879:175–176) and of “Ethics of Christian Fellowship” (1879:255) within the larger category of Christian Ethics. But these involve only a page or two of his nearly 1400 total pages.

In *Life in the Spirit*, volume three in his 1992 three-volume systematic theology, theologian and church historian Thomas Oden devotes 108 pages to the subject of the Church. He summarizes three basic ecclesiastical traditions—those focused on “personal conversion, or sacramental order, or base communities seeking structural change in the orders of social justice. These types have recurred in church history” (1992:262). The first group he describes as Evangelicals and pietists; the second as Anglican, Catholics, and Orthodox; and the third as social activists. Oden then warns of their respective dangers,

Those who focus too exclusively on conversion tend to neglect nurture; those who focus too intently upon the sustaining of sacramentally mediated apostolic tradition may neglect serving ministries and conversion. Those who focus upon the serving nature of the community in response to the needs of the world may tend to forget the ground of their authority and apostolic identity. (1992:262)

But the focus on mutual ministry is absent in his analysis. There is personal conversion that neglects personal nurture (but apparently not one-another nurture), sacramentalism that neglects service (but the context suggests service to the world’s needs), and social activists who serve the world’s needs (but apparently not one another).

Oden then develops his own understanding of the church, including definitions, metaphors, and discussions of the attributes (Word, sacrament, and discipline) and marks (unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity) of the church. Yet he makes only passing allusions or abstract references to any form of member-to-member mutual care. He notes that the church is “an interdependent body” (1992:279) that includes “the mutual edification one of another” (1992:281, citing the Cambridge Platform), and that “complementary gifts are required to make the economy work. . . . In this household, every member, every believer, has a calling, a niche, a place of service” (1992:295). Yet

there is no discussion of the mutual ministries mentioned at the start of our chapter. Even his summary of the body of Christ metaphor is essentially vertical-only—the body’s connection with Christ the head—with references to Ephesians 2–4, but with no reference to Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and the members’ ministry relationship with each other as fellow members of that body. For example, Oden notes, “The aim of the Christian life is to speak ‘the truth in love,’ so that ‘we will in all things *grow up into Him* who is the head, that is, Christ’ (Eph. 4:15, italics added)” (1992:290–291). Yet Oden does not mention 4:16 and the surrounding contexts or 4:1–6 and 4:17–5:2 that have much to say about mutual relationships within that body.

1.2.6 Baptist Theologians

In his 1767 *A Body of Doctrinal Divinity*, the English Baptist pastor and theologian John Gill covers the usual loci of systematic theology but does not address ecclesiology. However, he does so under the larger rubric of the worship of God in his subsequent 1770 work, *A Body of Practical Divinity*, which was later combined with his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity* and subsequently published after his death as *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. Here Gill treats a host of ecclesiological topics (e.g., the nature of the church, deacons, church discipline, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the public ministry of the Word) that we see in the standard systematic theologies surveyed in our chapter. Yet unlike those works, Gill (1978:568–573) does give detailed instructions on mutual member care in a five-page section, “Of the Duties of the Members of a Church to One Another.” These duties include:

1. To love one another, the principal one
2. To endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, including being on one mind
3. To sympathize with each other in all conditions and circumstances
4. To communicate to each other in such circumstances
5. To watch over one another
6. To bear with one another and to forbear with each other
7. To pray for one another
8. To separate themselves from the men of this world and not touch things that are defiling
9. To assemble together for religious worship
10. To show no “respect of persons” among members
11. To strive together for the faith of the gospel and earnestly to contend for it
12. To be examples to each other in a holy walk and conversation, and in an observance of all the duties of religion.

What about Baptists in America? Gill's example does not continue. In neither his 1857 *Manual of Theology* nor his 1858 *A Treatise on Church Order* does J. L. Dagg address the mutual ministry of church members. In the latter work, under the section entitled "Ministry," Dagg (1982:3:241–267) only discusses the ministry of pastors and deacons, not the laity.

James Boyce, the founder and first president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote his *Abstract of Systematic Theology* in 1887. It includes forty-two chapters covering the standard loci of systematic theology but with no discussion about the Church.

In his three-volume, 1056-page *Systematic Theology* manual, A. H. Strong devotes only one phrase to the ministry of mutual care. Strong (1907:899) mentions three general ways that a local church fulfils its ultimate purpose of bringing glory to God: "(a) By united worship,—including prayer and religious instruction; (b) by mutual watch care and exhortation; (c) by common labours for the reclamation of the impenitent world." Under the category of "mutual watchcare and exhortation," Strong cites 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and Hebrews 3:13. He does add, however, the duty of the whole church to preserve unity in its action, including several one-another commands to value and pursue peace such as Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 1:27; and 1 Peter 3:8 (1907: 904).

As noted earlier in our chapter, Mark Dever (2007:792–794, 812–813) includes a comprehensive list of the duties of members to one another although he does not discuss or develop them. In that section Dever provides a footnote pointing readers to a 2001 volume that he edited, entitled *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life (A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents)*. His footnote reads, "For teaching on the duties of church members by Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Griffith, the Charleston Association, Samuel Jones, W. B. Johnson, Joseph S. Baker, and Eleazar Savage, see Mark Dever, ed. *Polity*, 65–69, 103–105, 125–126, 148–151, 221–222, 276–279, and 510–511." Yet an examination of these references in that volume shows that the majority of the duties listed in those pages do not concern duties of members toward members but members toward various leaders or toward the church in general. The emphasis does not lie on the ministries of mutual Christian care (Dever 2001:65–69, 103–105, 125–126, 148–151, 221–222, 276–279, 510–511).

In his systematic theology manual, *Theology for the Community of God*, Stanley J. Grenz devotes one-sixth of the book to Ecclesiology, including twenty-one pages on

the church's mandate—its three ministry foci of corporate worship, mutual edification, and outreach to the world (which receives the most attention). Edification, in turn, involves three headings: aspects of edification, prayer, and a sociological discussion of the church as community. Aside from a page on prayer, the “aspects of edification”—both mutual care and the mutual strengthening of believers in their faith, the themes in this thesis—occupy less than two pages (Grenz 2000:496–497). Grenz mentions several specific ministries that our thesis addresses but bypasses others. In contrast, he spends thirty-six pages (511–541, 544–548) discussing the ordinances.

1.2.7 Broader Evangelical Theologians

Two broader evangelical theology manuals give more attention to the New Testament's emphasis on mutual care and ministry. In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem devotes 235 pages (chapters 44–53) to the doctrine of the church. In chapter 44, Grudem (2004:867–869) spends three pages outlining what he sees as the three purposes of the church: “1. Ministry to God: Worship; 2. Ministry to Believers: Nurture; and 3. Ministry to the World.” Yet his brief paragraph on nurture references only the work of church leaders and not the mutual ministry of the body. More helpful is Grudem's later discussion in chapter 48 on the “Means of Grace Within the Church,” where he goes beyond traditional categories of preaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper to summarize eleven ministries (and he notes that this is not an exhaustive list) that God uses to impart his grace to believers in the fellowship of the church. Five of these overlap with specific mutual care ministries we will consider below: prayer for one another, financial giving, spiritual gifts, fellowship (including several one-another ministries), and personal ministry to individuals (including words of encouragement or exhortation or wise counsel and giving to assist the material needs of a brother or sister) (2004:950–963).

In his *Christian Theology*, Millard J. Erickson addresses the Church and does better than most in addressing the matters of one-another ministry and mutual care. Erickson (2013:972–979) summarizes the four functions of the church: Evangelism, Edification, Worship, and Social Concern. Under Edification he includes a range of ministries, citing Ephesians 4:12–16. Based on that passage and Ephesians 4:29, he (2013:974) contends, “the potential for edification is the criterion by which all activities, including our speech, are to be measured.” Erickson (2013:975–976) asserts that the purpose of spiritual gifts is to edify the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:4–5, 12, 17, 26). He

underscores our thesis by noting that “edification is mutual upbuilding by all the members of the body, not merely the minister or pastor”.

We see Erickson’s very broad definition for edification, however, when he lists ministries that might better fit under a category like mutual care. Under this heading of Edification, he includes the common sharing—citing the word *koinōnia*—of both material possessions (referencing Acts 5) and one another’s experiences of joy and sorrow (referencing 1 Cor. 12:26, and “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.”). Erickson (2013:976) goes on to remark, “While hurt is reduced, joy is increased by being shared. We are to encourage and sympathize with each other.” At the same time, these two examples of *koinōnia* might demonstrate the weakness of Erickson’s four-function Evangelism/Edification/Worship/Social Concern paradigm. One could conceivably place the sharing of material possessions under Social Concern since that category includes “performing acts of Christian love and compassion for both believers and non-Christians” (2013:975). Furthermore, the sharing of joys and sorrows begs for a broader or additional category beyond “Edification”—like Mutual Care or even Fellowship (as other ecclesiology writers might label it⁹).

Erickson’s category of Edification also includes instruction and teaching, flowing from Jesus’s Great Commission command in Matthew 28:20 to teach converts “to obey everything I have commanded you” (2013:975–976). While he acknowledges the role of the church’s official pastors and teachers, he also recognizes the teaching role that members can have in a private setting (e.g., Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18), although, as we will see, there are broader expressions of mutual teaching beyond his one example. Furthermore, his category of Social Concern includes mutual care for the physical and material needs of those in the body, citing James 1:27; 2:1–11; 1 John 2:15–17; 3:17–18 (2013:978–979), although he previously and perhaps inconsistently included the sharing of material possessions in Acts 5 in the category of Edification. More careful thinking seems needed here.

⁹ See John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (2005:219–220), who surveys the various ways that four writers—Millard Erickson, Edmund Clowney, Stanley Grenz, and Rick Warren—organize the ministry functions of the church. He proposes a model that summarizes the church’s five activities of teaching, fellowship, worship, service, and evangelism based on the paradigm of Acts 2:42–47. Hammett also argues that these five ministries “form a distinguishing mark of the church and are intimately related to the church’s nature.”

1.3 Conclusion

Based on the above, we can draw several conclusions. First, as we saw in the first half of the chapter, the New Testament has much to say about the ministry of mutual care and one-another relationships within the body. In fact, judged by our three initial summaries that began this chapter, ministry in the New Testament is as much the activity of church members as it is the activity of the church's official pastors and deacons.

Second, however, in contrast to the biblical data above, we observe that a large number of standard, conservative manuals of systematic theology say little to nothing about the church.

Third, when these manuals do focus on the church, they frequently say little about the church's actual functioning or ministry. They instead explore ecclesiological topics like the four historic marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, or various matters like the nature, polity, purpose, and sacraments of the church. Of course, as stated earlier in this chapter, the weight of this critique and of the next two paragraphs depends on how one views the respective tasks of systematic theology and practical theology and how one assesses what ecclesiological topics should be addressed or ignored.

Fourth, even when these systematic theologies do address the church's ministry, they typically stress the role of the pastors/elders and deacons more than the role of members. They either overlook the themes of mutual member care or give only a brief summary treatment of them.

Perhaps most sadly of all, these examples of neglected theological treatment cross various denominational spectrums and span several centuries. The paucity of focus in systematic theology manuals on ecclesiological themes that fill the New Testament is disconcerting.

How might we respond to these observations? This thesis will provide a needed, fuller biblical-theological approach to the one-another ministry of mutual care within the New Testament local churches. In our next chapter, we will consider how the Bible describes the various expressions of the church, including home churches where much of the mutual care ministry most likely would have happened in the New Testament church. In chapter three we will see how God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit guide, motivate, and empower the ministries of mutual care by providing spiritual gifts and enabling power. In chapter four, we will closely consider a variety of specific mutual

care ministries, involving proper attitudes as well as action ministries and speaking ministries.

Chapter Two

The Identity of the Local Churches as Mutual Caring Communities

As we consider the mutual care ministries of local churches in the New Testament writings, we must consider some introductory and foundational ecclesiological matters. How should we define and picture the church, especially as it relates to mutual care and the one-another truths we saw in chapter one?

2.1 Defining the Church: Some Problems and a Working Definition

2.1.1 Two Problems in Defining the Church

In examining the New Testament teaching about the church, we immediately face the question of definition. Two problems arise. First, the English word “church” is used in a variety of different ways. “The church is at once a very familiar and a very misunderstood topic,” notes Millard Erickson. He then lists some of the evidences of its familiarity based on its observability. People belong to churches. They go to church on Sunday. Church buildings exist. The media and the legislatures mention church matters (2013:950). Neither systematic theology manuals or popular notions describe the church according to ministries of mutual care.

Why is there misunderstanding? Erickson (2013:951) answers,

But for all of this familiarity, there is frequently considerable confusion and misunderstanding concerning the church. Part of this misunderstanding results from the multiple usages of the term *church*. Sometimes it is used with respect to an architectural structure, a building. . . . At other times, it is used to refer to a denomination, a group set apart by some distinctive; for instance, the Presbyterian Church or the Lutheran Church.

As Erickson intimates, these popular, contemporary uses of the English term church lack New Testament support. The New Testament term church never refers to a physical building since, as we will see below, we have no evidence of dedicated church buildings until at least the latter part of the second century. Robert Mounce (1995:273) notes, “In the early days of the church believers met in homes for instruction and prayer (cf. Acts 2:42–47; Col 4:15). Obviously the growth of the church is not dependent upon buildings erected for the specific purpose of worship.” Moreover, the New Testament does not speak of a national church (e.g., the Church of England) or a denominational church (e.g., the Reformed Church in America or the Evangelical Free Church of America).

This is not to imply that denominations in our day are necessarily wrong but that denominations that seek biblical warrant for their use of “church” might better refer to themselves as some kind of association of churches (e.g., the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches [plural]).

The second problem is more foundational and goes deeper than semantic confusion. As we saw in chapter one, there are different theological understandings of the church, and those varying conceptions omit or minimize the dominant one-another ministries that describe the New Testament churches. Erickson (2013:951) continues, “In addition to the confusion generated by the multiple usages of the term *church*, there is evidence of confusion at a more profound level—a lack of understanding of the basic nature of the church.” This current problem has historical roots. Erickson (2013:951) explains,

Among the reasons for this lack of understanding is the fact that at no point in the history of Christian thought has the doctrine of the church received the direct and complete attention that other doctrines have received. At the first assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948, Father Georges Florovsky claimed that the doctrine of the church had hardly passed its pretheological phase. By contrast, Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity had been given special attention in the fourth and fifth centuries, as had the atoning work of Christ in the Middle Ages, and the doctrine of salvation in the sixteenth century. Even the Augustinian-Donatist controversy of the early fifth century, and the sixteenth-century dispute over the means of grace, while they dealt with aspects of the nature of the church, did not really get at the central issue of what the church *is*. Colin Williams suggests that “little direct theological attention was ever given to the church itself probably because it was taken for granted.”

Ernest Best agrees. In his important study of the church, *One Body in Christ*, Best (1955:ix) comments, “The nature of the Church has received increasing attention in recent years; yet when we look for help from the great creeds and confessions of Christendom we find they have little to give. The Church has never received formal definition.” He also cites George Florovsky in *The Universal Church in God’s Design*, who concludes, “It is impossible to start with a formal definition of the Church. For, strictly speaking, there is none which could claim any doctrinal authority. None can be found in the Fathers or in the Schoolmen or even in Thomas Aquinas.” Nor do modern studies of the church, notes Best (1955:ix), provide great help. They are “concerned more with its ecclesiastical structure than with its essential structure.”

When we come to exploring the biblical nature of the church as a mutually ministering community, the problem of defining the church is multifaceted. Popular

notions do not help us. Definitions of the church have varied historically. Christian theologians lack consensus. Creedal statements seldom supply articles defining the church. And for the purposes of my thesis, as we saw in chapter one, even those descriptions of the church that argue broadly for the four classic attributes of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity, or the three Reformation marks of pure doctrine, the right administration of sacraments, and proper discipline, frequently do not address the specific matters of mutual ministry.

2.1.2 A Working Definition of the Church

How should we understand the church? At this point, it will be helpful to begin where many contemporary ecclesiologies do not begin—the meaning and usage of the New Testament Greek word, *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία). K. L. Schmidt’s (1965:503–504) summary in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* provides a helpful starting point. “In both the secular and the biblical use of ἐκκλησία the dictionaries distinguish between the assembling of men and the men thus assembled. Hence a *prima facie* case can be made out for a word like ‘assembly,’ which has both an abstract and a concrete sense.” In other words, the term means both an actual assembly (a church gathered) and the people who do the gathering (the congregation or body).

We see this in the New Testament. In *The Church of Christ: a Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*, Everett Ferguson (1996:131) discusses these multiple senses. The Bible sometimes uses the term in “its concrete sense of an actual assembly to refer to the meetings of Christians.” He cites examples of the assemblies mentioned in 1 Corinthians (11:18; 14:19, 34–35). Ferguson (1996:131) then observes the second sense:

At other times, [Paul] refers to those people who assemble, whether the whole church, as at Corinth (1 Cor 14:23), or a smaller group, as in a house church (Rom 16:5; Phlm 2). From this, it was natural to use *ekklēsia* for the people, whether assembled or not. The great majority of instances of the word are in reference to a local church, hence the use of the plural for churches in a given region (1 Cor 16:1, 9; Gal 1:2, 22; Acts 15:41; 16:4–5). The use of the word for the people who customarily assemble (whether assembled or not) shows that it had become a technical term.

We will see in this chapter the tension between *ekklēsia* as a people actually assembled and *ekklēsia* as a body.

How should we define the church? After surveying exegetical data, Grudem (2004:857) asserts, “In the New Testament the word ‘church’ may be applied to a group

of believers at any level, ranging from a very small group meeting in a private home all the way to the group of all true believers in the universal church.” He then gives examples of the four expressions we will consider below. Grudem (2004:858) concludes,

The group of God’s people considered at any level from local to universal may rightly be called “a church.” We should not make the mistake of saying that only a church meeting in houses expresses the true nature of the church, or only a church considered at a city-wide level can rightly be called a church, or only the church universal can rightly be called by the name “church.” Rather, the community of God’s people considered at any level can be rightly called a church.

This core component—a group of believers, God’s people—lies at the heart of all expressions of the term church.

Yet two major clarifications seem needed. Grudem’s definition does not include the Christocentric nature and the Spirit-indwelling nature of the four expressions. Allison, however, provides a simple, clear definition of the church that includes these Christological and pneumatological components. Allison (2012:29) writes, “The church is the people of God who have been saved through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and have been incorporated into his body through baptism with the Holy Spirit.”

Both these components see vital. The New Testament church in all its forms is centred chiefly on Christ. The church consists of believers in Jesus Christ. It is the community of God’s people who belong to Christ. As Ferguson (1996:135) emphasizes,

The meeting of the church occurs in the name of Jesus Christ. The church meets because it is called together in Christ. The church derives its being and essence from Christ. This is so because God has acted definitively for human salvation in his death and resurrection. The Old Testament expectations centered on covenant, kingdom, and Messiah involved a forgiven people who receive the Holy Spirit.

Ferguson’s Old Testament comment spans the history of redemption, anticipating the universal church category. In adding an explicit Christ-centred component to Grudem’s summary above, we are not denying that the term *ekklēsia* was used to describe the Old Testament believing community and we are not arguing for or against the contention that the church began in the Old Testament. There certainly are continuities and discontinuities between God’s people in the older and new covenants that go beyond the

scope of this paper.¹⁰ We are simply arguing that the fourfold expression of *ekklēsia* in the New Testament to describe the churches is unmistakably Christian.

Moreover, as Chan (2006:31–32) reminds us, the church is the temple of God’s Spirit. After referring to the marks or core practices of the church as the people of God and the body of Christ, he writes, “It is the Spirit that makes these distinctive practices possible—practices that form the church. If the church is the body of Christ, a divine-humanity grounded in the narrative of the triune God, the Spirit’s relation to the church explains how this body is constituted as a vibrant community. It is the Spirit that links the church of Christ the Head.” In the same way, Badcock (2009:109–110) asserts, “An adequate doctrine of the church turns as much on the viability of such a pneumatological understanding as it does on Christology and the election of God.” Similarly, Allison (2012:117) agrees, observing that one essential component in defining the church is that it is “pneumadynamic,” i.e., “created, gathered, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.” Badcock (2009:336) brings these themes together in his concluding chapter:

The church exists as the *church of God* solely because of the decision of God to summon it into existence: it is born from God’s primal decisions that issues in the incarnation of the Son and in the sending and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, so that it comes into being not only as the people of God, but also in one action of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit.

These Christ-centred and Spirit-indwelling dynamics, as we will see in chapter three, provides church members the compelling motive, model, and power to carry out their one-another ministries.

2.2 Four Expressions of the Term “Church”

The term *ekklēsia* appears 114 times in the New Testament. Three refer to a secular assembly (Acts 19:32, 39, 40) and two refer to the Old Testament Israelites

¹⁰ See Allison (2012:39–43), for a detailed discussion on this. Since I share his view of moderate discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, and since I also concur with Allison that “the disciples did not constitute the church but were in the process of being prepared by Jesus to be the foundation and first leaders of the church, which was inaugurated at Pentecost” (81), I will focus my attention on the New Testament, particularly Acts and the epistles, as the norm for my ecclesiological discussions and conclusions in this thesis.

(Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12)¹¹. Of the remaining 109 times that refer to the New Testament church, three are found in the recorded words of Jesus (Matt 16:18; 18:17, 17; see below), nineteen in Acts, and eighty-seven in the epistles. We can divide them into two overarching categories (local and universal)¹² and four specific expressions: the household church, the citywide church, the regional church, and the universal church. See the table below:

Local Churches		Universal Church	
Household	Citywide (Key: * = possibly universal, see discussions below on each passage; pl = plural)	Regional	Universal
	Matt 18:17,17		Matt 16:18
	Acts 5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22,26; 12:1,5; 13:1; 14:23, 27; 15:3,4,22,41(pl); 16:5(pl); 18:22; 20:17	Acts 9:31	Acts 20:28
Rom 16:5	Rom 16:1,4(pl),16(pl),23		
1 Cor 16:19b	1 Cor 1:2; 4:17; 6:4; 7:17(pl); 10:32*; 11:16,18,22; 12:28*; 4:4,5,12,19,23,28,33(pl), 34(pl),35; 15:9*; 16:1(pl),19a(pl)		
	2 Cor 1:1; 8:1(pl); 18:18(pl),19(pl),23(pl), 24(pl); 11:8(pl),28(pl); 12:13(pl)		
	Gal 1:2(pl); 1:13*; 1:22(pl)		
			Eph 1:22; 3:10,21; 5:23,24,25,27,29,32
	Phil 3:6*; 4:15		
Col 4:15	Col 4:16		Col 1:18,24
	1 Thess 1:1; 2:14(pl)		
	2 Thess 1:1,4(pl)		
	1 Tim 3:5,15; 5:16		
Phlm 1:2			
	Jas 5:14		
	3 John 1:6,9,10		
	Rev 1:4(pl),11(pl),20(pl); 2:1,7(pl),8,11(pl), 12,17(pl), 18,23(pl), 29(pl); 3:1,6(pl),7,13(pl), 14,22(pl); 22:16(pl)		

In surveying these four expressions, we will start with the smallest, most local form and then expand to broader and more abstract uses. We will pay closest attention to the household church gatherings, where one would expect that the practice of mutual care could best express itself among its smaller membership.

¹¹ For the uses of ἐκκλησία to translate “assembly” and “congregation” in the Hebrew Scriptures, see Ferguson 1996:130–131.

¹² Some writers, such as Allison (2012:30–31), order these into two overarching categories: the local church (including the household and citywide churches) that gathered and the universal church (including the regional and universal) that did not.

2.2.1 The Household Church

We begin with what writers call the “house” or “household” church. In the New Testament, a group of believers that meets in someone’s home is called a church. Roger W. Gehring (2004:1) opens his book, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity*, by citing this consensus:

On one point nearly all NT scholars presently agree: early Christians met almost exclusively in the homes of individual members of the congregation. For nearly three hundred years—until the fourth century, when Constantine began building the first basilicas throughout the Roman Empire—Christians gathered in private houses built initially for domestic use, not in church buildings originally constructed for the sole purpose of public worship.

Craig S. Keener (1993:*en.loc.* Rom 16:5), concurs, noting the locations of various religious groups.

Small synagogues sometimes had to meet in homes before they could purchase buildings; many Greek religious associations did the same; churches did so for the first three centuries, using their income to buy slaves’ freedom, feed the poor and so forth, rather than to build edifices. In Rome, many well-to-do apartments existed above shops in multi-story tenement buildings; Aquila and Priscilla probably lived above their artisan shop. The Roman house churches might especially be threatened with disunity among themselves, because Rome (unlike the cities of the East) did not allow Jews to assemble on any level larger than local synagogues, and Christians were regarded as Jews.

What should we call this first use of *ekklēsia*? While most writers call it a “house” church, we will call them “household” churches for two reasons. First, the term “house,” at least in contemporary American culture, usually connotes a physical building in ways that “household” does not. This could give the impression that the focus was on the meeting place and not on the group itself. (At the same time, we must not infer that the members of a household church were solely the blood relatives and household servants of the owner.)

Second, citywide churches—assuming some actually met (see below) as a large group—also gathered in members’ houses, albeit in larger houses. In other words, the difference between a citywide church and a household church lies not in its meeting place—both met in homes—but its makeup. In *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, Robert J. Banks (1994:36) makes this distinction:

Whether we are considering the smaller gatherings of only some Christians in a city or the larger meetings involving the whole Christian population, it is in the home of one of the members that ἐκκλησία is held [Banks’s footnote here references Acts 18:7–8; 20:8]—for example in the “upper room” [Banks’s

footnote here references Acts 20:8; cf. Luke 22:12; Acts 1:13]. Not until the third century do we have evidence of special buildings being constructed for Christian gatherings and, even then, they were modelled on the room for receiving guests in the typical Roman and Greek household.

Banks uses “smaller gatherings” for what I am calling household churches and “larger meetings involving the whole Christian population” for the citywide church. In *The House Church in the Writings of Paul*, Vincent P. Branick (1989:15–16), like others, calls the smaller units “house” churches and the larger units “local” or “city-wide” churches.

2.2.1.1 Four household church passages in Paul’s epistles. We see the explicit household church language in the New Testament in four Pauline greeting passages—Romans 16:3–5a; 1 Corinthians 16:19–20a, Colossians 4:15–16, Philemon 1–3. Branick (1989:13; cf. Witmer 1985:499) concludes, “The four greetings are the four instances in which Paul speaks explicitly of house churches, assemblies of Christians that formed in and around a private household.” We will examine these four passages in their historical order.

1. 1 Corinthians 16:19–20. In his closing greetings, Paul greeted the Corinthians from Ephesus (16:8) with these words, “The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house. All the brothers here send you greetings” (1 Cor 16:19–20).

Aquila and Priscilla were apparently freepersons of Jewish origin who had previously lived in Rome until the Emperor Claudius’s edict against the Jews in A.D. 49 forced their departure to Corinth (Acts 18:2–3; Garland 2003:771). There they met Paul on his second missionary journey and apparently employed Paul in their tentmaking trade and became fellow-workers in his gospel ministry. From there they travelled with Paul to Ephesus and remained there for a period of time (Acts 18:18–21) while Paul journeyed to Caesarea. There in Ephesus they ministered to Apollos (Acts 18:24–26), updating and refining his grasp of the gospel message. There too was likely the place where they “risked their lives” (Rom 16:4) for Paul, perhaps during the riot recorded in Acts 19:23–41 (Moo 1996:920; Schreiner 1998:795; R.Mounce 1995:274). Scholars concur that this couple was financially well-off, enabling them to host a church body in their home and to travel internationally, On his third journey Paul reunited with them in Ephesus and from Ephesus wrote 1 Corinthians in which he included greetings to the Corinthian Christians from Priscilla, Aquila, and their household church.

As former Corinthian residents themselves, Aquila and Priscilla's greetings to the readers were especially warm. Furthermore, Gordon Fee (1987:835) notes that this couple's household church "is most likely the house church in Ephesus to which Paul himself is attached. Hence the greeting comes not only from their friends, but from the church as well."

What might Aquila and Priscilla's household church setting be like? Anthony Thistleton (2000:1343) writes,

If we put together the New Testament evidence with the reconstructions offered by Murphy-O'Connor, Banks, Bruce, and others, a coherent picture of this husband-and-wife team emerges. . . . They may well have been converted in Rome, and then came directly to the Roman colony of Corinth to set up their small shop in which to sell leathercraft among the commercial developments off the Lechaem road. When Paul arrived in Corinth, Aquila and Prisca were already Christian believers, and Murphy-O'Connor convincingly paints a picture of Aquila and Prisca having their home in the loft of one of the shops around the market square (approximately 13 ft. × 13 ft. × 8 ft. without running water) "while Paul slept below amid the tool-strewn work-benches and the rolls of leather and canvas. The workshop was perfect for initial contacts, particularly with women. While Paul worked on a cloak, or sandal or belt, he had the opportunity for conversation. . . ." ¹³

At the same time, Thistleton (2000:1343) cites with apparent agreement a German scholar named Gielen who argues that this was not a household church with a separate identity from the citywide church but the place where the whole church (or part of it) met. While the majority of scholars seem satisfied to view the church in verse 19 as a household church, we cannot dismiss the viewpoints of Thistleton and Gielen, even though they offer no rationale. Since all churches met in homes and not dedicated buildings, the conclusions cannot be as clear as we might want.

2. Romans 16:3–5a. About three years later, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, including these greetings: "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house."

Paul's extended list of personal greetings in Romans 16—the longest by far in any of Paul's epistles—includes twenty-seven specific men and women, along with others not named. Although Paul had never been to Rome, many believers whom he knew had apparently migrated to the empire's capital city. While Paul mentions no

¹³ Thistleton and other commentators on Paul refer to Priscilla as "Prisca," the name in the Greek text here and in Romans 16:3 and 2 Timothy 4:19. Luke uses "Priscilla" in Acts 18:2, 18, 26.

reason for his sequence, perhaps he began with those he knows best or those who served with him (Moo 1994:1158). Foremost among these ministry associates are Priscilla and Aquila, whom he commends highly and most thoroughly. Paul gives no reason for mentioning Priscilla's name first here and in three of the other five references to them. (Husbands were normally listed first in the ancient world.) Most commentators suggest that her priority stemmed from her family's status (e.g., R.Mounce 1995:274; Keener 1993:*en.loc.*; Arndt *et al.* 2000:863–864). While Paul prefers to use her more dignified name here and in 1 Corinthians 16:19 and 2 Timothy 4:19, Luke prefers the diminutive "Prisca" in Acts 18:2, 18, 26.

Here in Romans 16 we find Priscilla and Aquila back in Rome—Claudius's expulsion decree ended with his death—hosting a church in their house. Later they left Rome—perhaps at the time of the Neronian persecution (Hendriksen 1981:502)—and returned to Ephesus to minister there during Paul's Roman imprisonment (2 Tim 4:19).

3. Philemon 1–3. Later, toward the end of his career, Paul sent a brief letter from prison to his friend Philemon in the city of Colossae. Opening the letter in his conventional way, Paul wrote, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

In this letter, Paul appealed to Philemon to send back to Paul a man named Onesimus, one of Philemon's slaves who ran away from Philemon but was converted to Christ under Paul's ministry. Knowing the proper offer to make, Paul informed Philemon that he will send Onesimus back but he concurrently appealed to Philemon to release Onesimus and to let him stay with Paul because Onesimus has now become useful to Paul in his ministry.

In whose house did the church meet? Although Archippus is the nearest antecedent to the pronoun "your" in the Greek text, the context and flow of the letter leads the large majority of scholars to conclude that the church met in Philemon's home. They suggest that the other names were members of the church and not necessarily part of Philemon's immediate household (Bruce 1984:206; Dunn 1996:313; O'Brien 1998:273, Wright 1986:177; Moo 2008:383), although some suggest that Apphia might have been Philemon's wife. F. F. Bruce (1984:206) infers from this that "some of the Christians in the city had their regular meeting-place there."

Why does Paul address the entire household church in this personal matter between him and Philemon? Bruce (1984:206) believes that although Paul's greeting addressed the church, Paul and Philemon would have understood that "the letter is a private one, intended for Philemon alone." Part of Bruce's argument is the use of second person singular pronouns. In fact, "the involvement of the church . . . in what was Philemon's personal responsibility could well have been counterproductive."

Other scholars differ with Bruce. They draw a vital insight about mutual member care from Paul's inclusion of the household church. Addressing Bruce's objections, Moo (2008:383–384) comments,

The inclusion of Philemon's house church in the address is significant. The mention of Apphia and Archippus may have been little more than a courteous gesture, but the mention of the entire church cannot function in quite this way. Moreover, Paul gives indications in the letter that he has a larger audience in view. For while the bulk of the letter is addressed to an individual, with second-person singular forms, Paul also uses second-person *plural* forms: in v. 3—"grace and peace to *you*"; in v. 22—"I hope to be restored to *you* in answer to *your* prayers"; and in v. 25—"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with *your* spirit." These references seem to imply that the whole community would have been present as the letter was publicly read. By making the issue of Onesimus a public one, Paul increases the pressure on Philemon to respond as he wishes. But we should not view the public nature of the letter as simply a lawyer's tactic to win his case; it rather reflects the corporate nature of early Christianity, in which no matter was "private" but inevitably affected, and was affected by, one's brothers and sisters in the new family of God.

While we might question Moo's comment that *no* matter was private, his viewpoint fits well with the intimacy and shared life that the New Testament household church picture of intimates. Wright (1986:177) concurs. "The letter is personal, but nobody is an island. . . . Philemon's life is set in a corporate Christian context." Dunn (1996:313) also agrees,

At all events we should note that what might have seemed a purely personal matter between Philemon and Paul is shared . . . with the whole church. . . . The assumption is that the letter would be read openly at a meeting of the house church. Of course, this was a not altogether subtle way of bringing pressure on Philemon, but the very fact that it could be done indicates that Philemon was likely to recognize the church's right to take an interest in and even advise on the internal affairs of his own household; this was the character of their shared faith (v. 6).

Paul had no hesitations about encouraging true one-another Christian community and mutual member care in the churches to whom he writes.

4. Colossians 4:15–16. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul refers to a household church in neighbouring Laodicea, probably ten miles away. “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:15–16).

Due to the lack of accent marks in the earliest New Testament manuscripts, there has been some discussion about the gender and spelling of Nympha, but most Colossians scholars agree that it is very likely feminine (Bruce 1984:183; Dunn 1996:284; O’Brien 1998:256; Moo 2008:349). Dunn (1996:284) adds that she was likely unmarried or widowed, since a husband’s name would normally be mentioned if she owned a house and had a husband. She was also a woman of some financial means.

As in other cases above, we cannot know with certainty if the church in Laodicea was small enough and Nympha’s house large enough to accommodate all the believers in Laodicea. Yet Paul distinguishes the church in Nympha’s house from the church in Laodicea (v. 16), so we can assume that this is a distinct household church that does not encompass all Laodicean Christians. We can also assume that there was “at least one other house church in Colossae or Laodicea” (Dunn 1996:284), perhaps in addition to Philemon’s household church discussed above.

2.2.1.2 Other possible New Testament references to household churches.

One might ask at this point why there are not more references to the household churches in the New Testament. Branick’s (1989:11) answer is more than satisfying: “Because the existence of such house churches was not an issue for him, Paul says little directly about them as such.” The New Testament writers did not need to develop a doctrine of the household church because that was simply the place where believers assembled in their day. Meeting in homes was the unstated norm.

1. Acts. In the book of Acts we read of believers meeting together on specific occasions in various locations in Jerusalem:

- an upper room in a house that they might have borrowed or rented (Acts 1:12–14);
- an unidentified house that functioned as a kind of apostolic headquarters (2:1; 4:23, 31);
- an unidentified area probably outside that house (2:6); the temple courts (2:46; 3:1, 11; 5:12, 21);
- their own homes (2:42, 46); and

- in the house of Mary, where many people gathered for prayer (12:12).¹⁴

In terms of regular meetings of all the believers (beyond the apostles and those most closely identified with them), they apparently met in the temple courts (2:46; 5:11 Solomon’s Colonnade; 5:42) and in homes (2:46; 5:42). Branick (1989:14) notes how Luke describes these household meetings “as precisely the activity distinguishing the earliest Jerusalem believers from Jewish non-Christians. With their Jewish compatriots, these members of ‘the Way’ worshiped in the Temple, ‘while breaking bread at home’ (*kat’ oikon*, Acts 2:46; cf. 5:42). The Christian home appears here in exact counterpoint to the Jewish Temple.”

Yet the meetings in their homes are not described as “household *churches*” per se, as in the four Pauline references above. This leaves the question unanswered as to whether these were individual household churches or small groups within that one citywide church of Jerusalem. In another words, we know that they met in homes (2:46); we do not know if these were considered distinct household churches or merely believers getting together with one another in some less formal way. In light of the four Pauline household church passages, the existence of plural churches in Corinth, and over 3000 converts in Jerusalem, we might assume the presence of numerous household churches within the citywide church of Jerusalem (Frame 2013:1020).

In Acts 8:3, we read, “But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.” Some commentators believe that “house to house” refers to Paul persecuting household churches (e.g., Fee 1987:835; possibly John Polhill 1995:212). David Peterson (2009:277) notes that because of Saul’s actions, “The community life, which found its strength in house meetings and spread its influence from that joyful and caring context (2:46–47), was now systematically dismantled,” although he does not call them household churches. Most commentators, however, do not assume that Saul invaded household church meetings but that his persecution efforts meant tracking down believers in their individual homes.

As we move beyond the citywide church in Jerusalem to the remainder of Acts (Acts 8:44ff.), the believers seemingly met in homes. While Paul would visit a

¹⁴ Since this description lacks the household church formula, it seems best to view this as an *ad hoc* prayer meeting of some members of the citywide Jerusalem church (*ekklēsia* in 12:1, 5, but not 12:12) and not a fifth explicit example of a household church (*contra* Allison 2012:62).

synagogue on arriving to a new city, he did so to evangelize and we have no evidence that Christians met in synagogues for Christian church life. In Acts 19, Paul taught daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, but this does not look like the kind of church gathering that we see in Acts 2:42–47 or 1 Corinthians 11–14. We do, however, see the apostles and other believers meeting in the homes of Cornelius (Acts 10), John Mark’s mother Mary (Acts 12), Lydia (Acts 16), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), Jason (Acts 17), Titius Justus (Acts 18); Mnason (Acts 21); and Paul’s own rented quarters (Acts 28), although some of these references might only indicate occasional visits and displays of hospitality, not necessarily regular locations for the church assembling. Unfortunately, Acts gives us very little information about where and when the churches met so our default assumption is that they met in homes.

What about household churches in the epistles, beyond the four explicit references above?

2. Romans 16. Schreiner (1998:789) suggests that the “churches of the Gentiles” in 16:4 might refer to household churches in Rome. Citing the 1939 work of F. W. Filson, and beyond the explicit example of Priscilla and Aquila in Romans 16:3–5a above, Schreiner also suggests the same chapter includes four more household churches, i.e., the homes of Aristobulus (v. 10), Narcissus (v. 11), the group of names in verse 14, and the group of names in verse 15. He also references P. Lampe’s 1991 work that suggests three more household churches and P. Minear’s 1971 work that suggests five or six more. But Schreiner offers no evidence and his conclusion is necessarily tentative: “We do not know how many house churches existed in Rome at this time, nor do we have details on how they functioned.”

3. Pastoral Epistles. David C. Verner (1983), *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, also argues that the household church is the backdrop of the Pastoral Epistles.¹⁵

4. Hebrews. After advancing a rationale for why the recipients of the letter to the Hebrews most likely lived in an urban setting, William Lane (1991:liii) writes,

The intended audience was almost certainly a house church, one of several scattered throughout the different districts and sections of the city. The early Christians met in ordinary rooms in private houses. They are undoubtedly a

¹⁵ In referencing Verner and other writers like Branick (1989:13) and Gehring (2004) above, I am not necessarily agreeing with all the conclusions they draw about the household church, e.g., that the family head became the church elder. For a critique of these views, see Benjamin L. Merkle (2010:173–198).

small group, consisting of the members of a household and some of their associates and close friends.

5. 1 Peter. Branick (1989:14) notes, “Other early Christian groups outside the Pauline circle met in private houses. First Peter, most probably written from Rome, likewise includes much indirect evidence of household churches.” He cites John Elliot, *A Home for the Homeless. A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy*, who argues for the centrality of both the house and household metaphors in 1 Peter based on the prominence of the *oikos* and family terminology, although Elliot does not focus on the size or location of actual household church meetings. Elliot (1981:59–63) argues that this epistle was a circular letter addressed to readers in five geographical areas in Asia Minor covering 128,889 square miles. The readers were more rural than urbanized and reflected greater economic, social, ethnic, and geographic diversity than the region of Asia Minor to whom Paul addressed his letters. This also leads Elliot (1981:64, cf. 165–167) to stress the centrality of household churches in 1 Peter.

The predominantly rural composition of the provinces and people addressed, and the absence of evidence for the existence of city churches in all areas except Asia, also suggest that 1 Peter was addressed to household communities, domestic pockets of Christians dispersed across the landscape of Asia Minor.

Household churches appear to be the norm throughout Acts and the New Testament epistles.

2.2.2 The Citywide Church

The first and second New Testament uses of *ekklēsia*—the household church and the citywide church—both refer to local churches of believers who meet together regularly and minister to one another. Allison (2012:62) observes that both types are called a church: “These smaller gatherings were called churches, but so were the whole church gatherings.” Some writers, like Strong (1907:890), call them both “the individual church,” in contrast to the universal or regional church use.

The individual church may be defined as that smaller company of regenerate persons, who, in any given community, unite themselves voluntarily together, in accordance with Christ’s laws, for the purpose of securing the complete establishment of his kingdom in themselves and in the world.

But Strong does not distinguish between the household church and the citywide church.

We see this use of the singular form throughout the New Testament to discuss churches in specific towns or cities. This is the most frequent use of *ekklēsia* in the New Testament. Consider the book of Acts. Erickson (2013:956) explains,

In Acts also, ἐκκλησία refers primarily to all the Christians who live and meet in a particular city such as Jerusalem (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:1, 5) or Antioch (13:1). Paul visited local churches to appoint elders (14:23) or to instruct and encourage (15:41; 16:5). This local sense of the church is evidently intended in the vast majority of occurrences of the word ἐκκλησία.

Paul and the book of Revelation also demonstrate this usage. Erickson (2013:956) notes,

Since the majority of [Paul's] writings were letters addressed to specific local gatherings of believers, it is not surprising that the term usually has reference to a group of believers in a specific city. Thus we find Paul's letters addressed to "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), "the churches in Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), "the church of the Thessalonians" (1 Thess. 1:1). The same holds true of other New Testament writings as well. The opening portion of John's Apocalypse (Rev. 1–3) was addressed to seven specific churches).

Aside from the plural usage in Galatians 1:2, Erickson's examples seem persuasive. A group of believers in an entire city is often called a church in the New Testament.

In 1 Timothy the apostle Paul gave counsel to his special representative Timothy. Two church issues arise in 1 Timothy 3:14–15, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."

First, since there is no explicit subject in the Greek text before the verbal construction "ought to conduct" in verse 15, at least one commentator suggests that Paul is telling Timothy how Timothy should conduct himself, since he is the subject of the main verb" (Guthrie 1990:102). The vast majority of writers, however, agree that the apostle focuses on the conduct of the members (Knight 1992:179; W.Mounce 2000:220; Lea & Griffin 1992:122; Kelly 1963:86; and others). This seems to best fit the context of the passage and the thrust of the entire letter.

Second, does the "the church" here mean the universal church or a citywide church? Philip Towner (2006:274) and A. Duane Lipton (1985:739) assume the former interpretation, but offer no rationale. Yet several factors suggest that Paul has in mind the local church in Ephesus and, most likely, other local churches in other cities: (1) Grammar: the absence of definite articles before *ekklēsia* and οἴκῳ θεοῦ points to a local church reference more than a universal church reference (Guthrie 1990:*en.loc.*; W.Mounce 2000:220–221; Kelly 1963:87). (2) Context: the reference to "these

instructions” (ταῦτά) in 3:14 apparently points us back to the previous admonitions in 2:1–3:13, including practical local church matters like men’s and women’s roles and the qualifications of overseers and deacons (W.Mounce 2000:220–221). (3) Usage: the other uses of *ekklēsia* in 1 Timothy—in 3:5 (referring to overseers caring for God’s church) and 5:14 (re: church caring for widows)—address local church functioning (Knight 1963:180–181).

2.2.2.1 The setting and size of citywide churches and household churches.

Where might the church body gather and how many members might participate? Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (1983:153), in *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, summarizes the archaeological evidence. Since there were no dedicated church building until at least the second half of the second century, long after the canonical New Testament documents were written, his insights are vital for our understanding of New Testament church functioning.

Private houses were the first centers of church life. Christianity in the 1st cent. A.D., and for long afterwards, did not have the status of a recognized religion, so there was no question of a public meeting-place, such as the Jewish synagogue. Hence, use had to be made of the only facilities available, namely, the dwellings of families that had become Christian.

Where in the house might they meet? Murphy-O’Connor (1983:155) observes, “Given the social conditions of the time, it can be assumed that any gathering which involved more than very intimate friends of the family would be limited to the public part of the house, and our concern here is to try and determine how much space was available.” The public part of such a house would consist of the triclinium (a more private dining area) and the atrium (an open area outside of the triclinium).

How many people could gather in such a house? Based on archaeological remains from the Roman period in Corinth, Murphy-O’Connor reviews the structures of four houses in Corinth, giving special attention to one, the villa at Anaploga, which would date back to the time of Paul. The floor area of this house’s atrium measured 30 sq. meters while the triclinium measured 41 sq. meters. Averaging that figure with the other three slightly larger houses that dated later than Paul’s ministry, he notes, “the average size of the atrium is 55 sq. meters and that of the triclinium 36 sq. meters.” But not all of this area would have been usable, since couches in the triclinium and an impluvium (the water pool below the roof opening) in the atrium would have reduced the gathering space. “Thus,” concludes Murphy-O’Connor (1983:156–157), “the

maximum number that the atrium could hold was 50, but this assumes that there were no decorative urns, etc. to take up space and that everyone stayed in the one place; the true figure would probably be between 30 and 40.”

Given the house setting for both the citywide church and the household church, Banks (1994:35) draws similar conclusions and suggests similar numbers.

This puts a limit on the numbers involved. The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably—perhaps half as many again in an emergency. . . . A meeting of the “whole church” may have reached forty to forty-five people—if the meeting spilled over into the atrium then the number could have been greater, though no more than double that size—but many meetings may well have been smaller. The average membership was around thirty to thirty-five people. . . . The “house churches” and the domestic groups would have been much smaller.

In a later work, co-authored with his wife, *The Church Comes Home*, Banks (1998:29) describes the size and setting of the gatherings in the Pauline churches. Their observations coincide with Murphy-O’Connor:

Smaller and larger meetings of church generally took place in a house or apartment, rather than in a special building (Rom 16:5, 23; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 2). Such groups were not very large. Considering the size of average first-century houses (which were owned by less than 20 percent of the population), there were probably twelve to fifteen persons meeting in ‘the church in the house’ and no more than sixty to eighty as “the whole church.”

Citing both Banks and Murphy-O’Connor, and allowing for some defections within the church (based on the epistle’s content), William Lane (1991:liii) suggests the following about the estimated size of the household church recipients of the letter to the Hebrews:

They are undoubtedly a small group, consisting of the members of a household and some of their associates and close friends. They number, perhaps, no more than fifteen or twenty persons (cf. Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community*, 41–42; Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul Corinth*, 153–161). Although they had experienced a sense of identity and intimacy through participation in the fellowship of a household group, their numbers had been depleted through defections (10:25). The description of the church as the ‘house’ of God (3:6b, 10:21) in Hebrews may be intentional in its implied reference to the gathering of the house church.”

In his *House Church and Mission*, Gehring summarizes archaeological research on the possible geographical locations, types of structures, and probable physical dimensions of New Testament house churches. He considers the “pre-Easter” meeting places of Jesus and his disciples in Jerusalem (chapter 2), the “post-Easter” meeting places in Jerusalem for the apostles and believers in Acts (chapter 3), and the Pauline mission

house churches beyond Jerusalem (chapter 4). Summarizing the evidence for the most likely option in the last category, Gehring (2004:290) concludes, “The numerical size of the first house churches was relatively small (on average, twenty to forty persons; in very few exceptional cases, up to a hundred).” Why is this important? “Hence by necessity these first Christian communities were small, family-like groups in which individual pastoral care, intimate personal relationship, and accountability to each other were possible.” In other words, in terms of our thesis, the smaller size of these household churches (and house meetings of citywide churches) would likewise make the one-another mutual care ministries that we will discuss in chapter four more personal and more effective.

2.2.2.2 The relationship between the citywide church and the household churches. The existence of both citywide churches and household churches raises the question of their relationship to each other. Were they separate groups or somehow interrelated? In their article, “The ‘House Churches’ in Corinth,” Bruce Button and Fika J. Van Rensburg argue, based on lexical studies, that what we are calling household churches were subgroups of the citywide churches. In other words, members of the citywide church often met in smaller units in homes (the four uses in 2.2.1.1 above, Rom 16:3–5a; 1 Cor 16:19–20a; Col 4:15–16; Phlm 1–3). Allison (2012:312–313) agrees, noting that

Paul is not addressing “the church in the house,” implying the existence of several or many other churches in different houses. Rather, he is referencing “the church that specifically gathers in a particular house”: that is, the church in Corinth—the fundamental unit—expressed its life and ministry through meetings that took place in the houses of its members. . . .

This leads to the next set of questions: When did each respective body assemble? How frequently? And what about those cities where there was both a citywide church and several household churches in that same city? For example, did “setting aside” money for the offering to the Jerusalem saints “on the first day of the week” (1 Cor 16:1–2) imply a weekly citywide church gathering of the Corinthian church? Assuming that the first day of the week was the day of worship, at least two possibilities emerge: (1) Maybe the citywide church met weekly and the household churches met more frequently. (Perhaps this is what Acts 2:42–47 pictures, in the Jerusalem church, since it describes daily meetings.) (2) Or maybe the household church met weekly and the citywide church met less frequently.

Banks believes this latter scenario best explains several passages in 1 Corinthians. In 14:22–23, the apostle Paul envisions this scene, “So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” While the passage is part of Paul’s argument about the superiority of prophecy to tongues, Banks (1994:32) focuses on the situation implied by the “the whole church coming together” (συνέλθῃ ἡ ἐκκλησία ὅλη) in an assembly.

In 1 Corinthians Paul alludes to an occasion on which “the whole church” came together (1 Cor 14:23). This implies that at other times the Christians in Corinth came together in small groups, quite possibly as “church.” The reference to various groups in Corinth who owed their existence to the work of different apostles, viz., Peter, Apollos, and Paul, may be relevant here (1:12–13).

In other words, Banks suggest that this passage describes a special, occasional gathering of the whole church—the citywide church—beyond the regular gatherings of the household churches. On this occasion, the household churches gathered together as one citywide church.

Fee (1987:683–684) concurs. “The language for their assembling together is nearly identical to that found in [1 Corinthians] 11:20: ‘the whole church comes together at the same place.’” His footnote here adds, “As in 11:20 the NIV omits the additional qualifier ἐπὶ τῷ αὐτό, probably as a redundancy. As noted there, this probably means ‘together,’ although here it may mean in a single gathering over against multiple gatherings in various house churches.” Fee’s main comment then continues, “Along with the salutation and the evidence from Romans 16:23, this implies that all the believers from all the household churches met together in some way.” The salutation in 1:2 reminds readers that Paul writes to “the church (singular) in Corinth” and the evidence from Romans 16:23 (which I will address below) refers to the whole church enjoying hospitality in the home of Gaius. Fee’s reference to 1 Corinthians 11:20, “So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat,” pictures, for both Banks and Fee, a special, occasional assembly of the citywide church, beyond the regular household church meetings. At the same time, Fee (1987:684) concludes his section with a note of humility. He raises several practical questions and then responds, “We simply do not know.”

Most commentators on 14:23, however, say nothing about the nature of the whole church assembling. They understand it as a rhetorical voice, a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* to show the Corinthians the chaos that would ensue if everyone—the whole

church—began speaking in tongues. Anthony Thistleton (2000:1127; also Garland 2003:651) argues that Paul is “deliberately impressionistic.” Paul is “floating a scenario” to summarize his argument. He is not implying that “the *entire* community could squeeze into a single large house or villa, including sympathetic inquirers or catechumens and unbelievers.” Richard Pratt (2000:248; also Kistemaker 1993:501) suggests, “Paul imagines *the whole church* assembled, with *everyone* speaking *in tongues* (the complete fulfilment of the wildest dreams of those who saw ‘tongues’ as the most desirable of the gifts). . . . The result will be disastrous.”

How does Fee respond? Referring to 14:22–23 together, Fee (1987:683) observes,

Both sentences take the same form: a present general condition in which the protasis expresses the hypothetical situation of the gathered church into which unbelievers enter and the apodosis expresses their response—first to tongues, then to prophecy. Although hypothetical, and probably overstated, the protases must nonetheless be taken seriously as real possibilities; otherwise the argument is to no avail. Thus these illustrations give us several insights into an early Christian gathering for worship.

In other words, the possibility of the whole church—the citywide church—of Corinth gathering in 1 Corinthians was not idealistic. Verlyn D. Verbrugge (2008:384) envisions similar possibilities of the whole church meeting either in a large house or outdoors.

Banks (1994:30) makes a similar point concerning Romans 16:23a, where Paul, likely writing from Corinth, writes, “Gaius, whose hospitality I and the whole church here enjoy, sends you his greetings.” How should we understand Gaius’s work of providing hospitality to Paul and the “whole church” (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας)? Commentators offer two different answers (Morris 1988:544). Does it merely mean that various members of the entire church enjoyed hospitality on various occasions of needed care or does it mean that he hosted the entire citywide church on one or several occasions? Moo (1996:935) allows for either but favours the first option since “it is unlikely that the entire church at Corinth would have met in one house.” Bruce (1985:279) believes, as others do, that Gaius is the same person as Titius Justus. Based on this, Bruce cites the time when Gaius “extended the hospitality of his house to Paul and his hearers when they were expelled from the synagogue next door (Acts 18:7),” although Bruce does not comment on how that would signify the “whole” church of Corinth.

But James Dunn (1998:910–911) disagrees, offering four objections to this first view. He then argues for the second view, citing the conclusions that we have seen from Murphy-O’Connor and Banks:

The most obvious way to take the phrase therefore is as a reference to “the whole church in Corinth” (BGD ξένοϛ 2c). The objection that Gaius’ house could hardly have accommodated all the Christians in Corinth (Michel) makes unsubstantiated assumptions about the size of the church in Corinth. A typical well-to-do home of the time could accommodate meetings of 30–40, at best 50 (Banks, *Community*, 41–42, 120–21; J. D. G. Dunn, “The Responsible Congregation (1 Cor 14:26–40),” in *Charisma und Agape (1 Kor 12–14)*, ed. L. de Lorenzi [Rome: Abtei von St Paul, 1983] 204–5; Murphy-O’Connor, 156–58), and there is no good reason to suppose that “the whole church” in Corinth was by this time any larger.

Dunn (*ibid*) then cites Banks:

As Banks (38) points out, the adjective “whole” must mean that there were other meetings of the church in Corinth, that is, in smaller house churches (if the Corinthian Christians met only as a single group the adjective would be superfluous), and it probably means that “the whole church” was able to meet only at less frequent intervals (since the atrium of Gaius’s house would probably be very crowded and uncomfortable with a number much in excess of about 40 [Murphy-O’Connor]), presumably for special celebrations and meetings. Whatever the precise facts, Gaius must have been a man of considerable means.

Here is Banks’s (1994:32) own explanation of ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας in Romans 16:23:

In the Greek OT this expression consistently refers to an assembly of all Israel; thus, it must be the totality of Christians in Corinth that is in view here (e.g., Exod 12:6; Num 8:9). Gaius, like Erastus (Rom 16:23), was probably one of the more eminent men in the city. It is not surprising that his home should be used for a gathering of the whole Christian community. Ample space would be required for such a meeting and it is precisely this that a man of Gaius’ status could provide. Once again the qualification “whole,” unnecessary if the Christians of Corinth met only as a single group, implies that smaller groups also existed in the city.

After weighing the two views, Thomas Schreiner (1998:808) agrees with both Dunn and Banks, “It is more plausible, however, that the term *ekklēsia* here represents the local church and that Gaius provided a place for the meeting of the entire assembly. Gaius was obviously a man of some wealth to support the church in this way.”

Given his understanding of multiple household churches with a single citywide church in Rome and in Corinth, Banks (1994:32) further argues that the language of assembling or gathering together in the following 1 Corinthians passages suggests that the citywide church in Corinth met on special occasions, beyond the individual household churches:

- 5:4, So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present. . . .
- 11:18, In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.
- 11:20, So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. . . .
- 11:33, So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.
- 14:23, So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues. . . .
- 14:26, What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn. . . .

How should we assess Banks's thesis? In light of Murphy-O'Connor's research on the size of Roman houses and the exegetical insights of various New Testament commentators above, Banks offers a cogent and intriguing explanation of the size and the meeting places of New Testament believers. At the end of the day, however, we have too little data to form a strong conclusion about the relationship between the citywide church and the household churches.

2.2.3 The Regional Church

In Acts 9:31, the New Testament uses the term church as a singular noun to refer to all believers in a larger geographical region, a group of people too large and too widespread to assemble in a local setting. "Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace and was strengthened" (Acts 9:31). Strong (1907:891) interprets this use of church as "either as a generic or as a collective term, to denote simply the body of independent local churches existing in a given region or at a given epoch." He concludes, "But since there is no evidence that these churches were bound together in any outward organization, this use of the term ἐκκλησία cannot be regarded as adding any new sense to those of 'the universal church' and 'the local church.'" Since this group of people were scattered away from the church in Jerusalem, Bruce Button and Fika J. Van Rensburg (2003:6) see this as a reference to the local church, an extension of the Jerusalem church. But the writer's focus is on the group of believers who were no longer meeting in Jerusalem and who were now enjoying peace and strengthening in the region beyond Jerusalem. Moreover, this passage marks the start of the various more local churches in this broader region. Allison (2012:62–63) subsumes this concept of regional church under the category of the universal church. He suggests that the church in Acts 9:31 consists of the scattered members of the Jerusalem

church and the newly-converted Samaritan believers, but that they would not have all assembled in one locations.

Erickson (2013:956) adds 1 Corinthians 16:19 (“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings”) to this category, but admits that Paul refers to churches (plural, not singular), so we are not including this passage as a regional church example.¹⁶

Since we have no evidence or reason to believe that this larger body assembled together, we will not consider its mutual ministry. This third form of “church” expression adds little to the thesis.

2.2.4 The Universal Church

In several passages of Scripture, the term *ekklēsia* refers to the church in a global or cosmic way as the company of Christian believers throughout the entire world, even those who are scattered and not part of a visible church body. We can consider four passages or groupings of passages.

1. Matthew 16:18. Perhaps the most well-known reference to the concept of a universal church is the words of Jesus himself to Peter in Matthew 16:18, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” The text uses the term church in a singular form—“I will build my church”—referring to the concept of the church in a more overarching sense than the many New Testament churches (plural) that his apostles would plant. Matthean scholars concur. R. T. France (2007:623–624) explains that

in a Jewish context *ekklēsia* would be particularly heard as echoing its frequent LXX use for the “assembly” of the people of God, which thus denotes the national community of Israel. But now Jesus speaks with extraordinary boldness of “*my ekklēsia*”—the unusual Greek word-order draws particular attention to the “my.” The phrase encapsulates that paradoxical combination of continuity and discontinuity which runs through the NT’s understanding of Jesus and his church in relation to Israel. The word is an OT word, one proudly owned by the people of Israel as defining their identity as God’s people. But the coming of Israel’s Messiah will cause that “assembly” to be reconstituted, and the focus of its identity will not be the nation of Israel, but the Messiah himself: it is *his* assembly. . . . In using this familiar LXX term to describe the community that will derive from Jesus’ ministry, Matthew is developing an important typological theme of the continuity of the people of God in Old and New Testaments. . . .

¹⁶ At the same time, both Garland (2003:771) and Ciampa and Rosner (2010:861) suggest that Paul’s reference to regional churches reminds the Corinthian readers that they are not entirely independent but an organic part of a larger family.

In other words, this use of “church” carries overtones of covenantal continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament people of God, and eschatological fulfilment of Old Testament themes, more than the actual assembly of these new people (although they did assemble) that we saw in the first and second uses above. Craig Blomberg (1992:253) agrees, “Jesus implies nothing here of any particular church structure or government; he merely promises that he will establish a gathered community of his followers and help them to grow.” D. A. Carson (2010:419) concurs, “Thus *ekklēsia* (‘church’) is entirely appropriate in Matthew 16:18; 18:17, where there is no emphasis on institution, organization, form of worship, or separate synagogue. . . . Acknowledged as Messiah, Jesus responds that he will build his *ekklēsia*, his people, his church—which is classic messianism.” This reference to *ekklēsia* is less about the assembling of a specific group and more about their Christocentric identity as the new people of God.

At the same time, Jesus uses the term twice in Matthew 18:17 to refer to how members should behave within a local church assembly (Osborne 2010:686). While Carson’s comment about Matthew 18:17 in the above paragraph is true—the emphasis is not on institution—Carson (2010:456) later recognizes that Jesus’s followers at that point were forming a community. Depending on when one views the start of the church, a discussion beyond the scope of this paper, this is how wanted his messianic community to function.

2. Acts 20:28. Here the apostle refers to the “church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” This description seems to go beyond the church in Ephesus and any assembled church community to refer to believers everywhere whom God redeemed through Christ’s atonement. At the same time, passages where the *ekklēsia* suffered persecution in Acts 8:3 (from Saul of Tarsus) and in Acts 12:1 (from King Herod) seem understood best as persecution against the citywide church in Jerusalem not just as general references to all Christians everywhere.

3. Three passages in 1 Corinthians possibly picture the universal church. In 1 Corinthians 10:32, the apostle refers to three groups that the readers must not cause to stumble—“Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.” Does the latter refer to believers in general or to the church in Corinth? While the principle would apply to all Christians, there is no reason to assume that Paul must have in mind any group beyond the church of his readers. He uses similar language in 9:19–23 to describe the three categories of unsaved Jews (under the law), unsaved Gentiles (not having the law), and Christians

like himself (under Christ's law) (Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner 2010:496–497). The point of both chapters 9 and 10 is to encourage the readers in the church in Corinth to adopt his perspective since it is true also of them. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 Paul lists gifted people that God has given the church, including apostles. Since the scope of the apostles' ministries went beyond the limits of a single church, one could argue that this reference is to a universal church (Grudem 2004:858). At the same time, however, one can also argue that apostles like Paul and Apollos¹⁷ were indeed given to the church in Corinth (albeit not exclusively) for a given period, and there is no reason to assume that Paul did not have the Corinthians explicitly in mind as he wrote to them.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; and Philippians 3:6; Paul records his past activity of persecuting “the *ekklēsia* of God” (singular) without an explicit limitation to it being the church of Jerusalem. Yet because these are specific historical references to his persecuting work of that church (cf. Acts 8:3 above) and not churches universally, one can argue that these texts most likely refer to individual citywide churches.

4. Ephesians and Colossians. The apostle Paul uses the term *ekklēsia* in a more comprehensive sense nine times in Ephesians and twice in Colossians.¹⁸ In Ephesians, God appointed Christ to be head over everything for the church, his body (1:22–23); his church is the means by which God will display his manifold wisdom (3:10); and the husband-wife relationship pictures the church's submission to Christ and Christ's love for the church (5:24–25). Referring to these passages, Allison (2012:62) writes, “Here, the church cannot refer only to a particular, local church; rather the church as the body of its universal head must be the entity commonly called ‘the universal church.’” We see the same theme in Colossians, where Christ is the head of his body, the church (1:18), and Paul recognizes that his suffering is for the church (1:24).

Each of these texts make general theological statements about the work of Christ on behalf of all believers, not specific statements made only to or about one church. They seemingly transcend the local church. Commenting on Ephesians 1:22, O'Brien (1999:146) writes, “The term ‘church,’ which in Paul frequently refers to a local congregation of Christians in a particular place (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1, 4; 2:14; Gal 1:2, etc.), or a gathering that met in a home, namely, a ‘house church’ (Rom 16:5; Col

¹⁷ For the argument that Paul regarded Apollos as an apostle, see Andrew Wilson, “Apostle Apollos?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56:2 (2013), 325–335.

¹⁸ See above for two other non-universal-church references in Colossians: 4:15 (household church) and 4:16 (citywide church).

4:15; Phlm 2, etc.), can on occasion have a wider reference.” They encompass all who belong to Christ (Gehring 2004:257–258).

In what wider sense does this use of *ekklēsia* apply to all believers everywhere? What is this wider reference? Two answers have been given. The most common response is represented by William Klein (2006:61), who comments on Ephesians 1:22,

A term used in the LXX for the community of Israel, [*ekklēsia*] was readily applied by Christians to their own congregations. In Paul’s usage it became the technical term to identify the Christian body. Applied regularly in the NT to local assemblies or house churches (e.g., Mt 18:17; Ro 16:5; 1 Co 11:18; 14:4–5, 12, 19, 28, 33, 35; 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm 2; 3 Jn 6), “church” in Ephesians mainly denotes the wider or universal body of believers (1:22; 3:10, 21; 5:23–25, 27, 29, 32), though that sense is not limited to Ephesians or to Paul.

This would refer to believers who may be scattered throughout the world but belong to one worldwide body, the universal church. Similarly, referring to Paul’s use of this term church in the passages, Andrew Lincoln (1990:67) writes,

In a number of places he appears to have in view an entity which is broader than the merely local congregation. Colossians certainly refers to a Church which consists of all believers (1:18, 24), as well as containing references to local gatherings (4:15, 16). Here in Eph 1:22, following Col 1:18, 24 where ἐκκλησία is used in apposition to σῶμα as a designation for the new community in Christ, the reference is to the universal Church, the Christian community in its totality. This is also the case in the other eight uses of the term in Eph 3:10, 21; 5:23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32.

This is also the consensus and traditional view among most evangelical systematic theologians. Grudem (2004:853) offers an expansive definition for the universal church: “The church is the community of all true believers for all time. This definition understands the church to be made of all those who are truly saved.” The concept of the universal church includes all believers, past or present, in the Old Testament age or New Testament age, whether on earth or in heaven. “The church of Christ, in its largest signification, is the whole company of regenerate persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth” (Strong 1907:887). Erickson (2013:957) concurs, “Obviously the church includes all persons anywhere in the world who are savingly related to Christ. It also encompasses all who *have* lived and been part of his body, and all who *will* live and be part of his body. It includes all such persons, whether in heaven or on earth” (emphasis added).

Yet there are two major weaknesses in this understanding, as O’Brien (1999:146) points out. First, it removes from *ekklēsia* any notion of “gathering” or “assembly,” since a worldwide church cannot gather or assemble together. Second, the

contexts in Ephesians and Colossians, especially Colossian 1:15–20, picture a supernatural and heavenly phenomenon more than an earthly one.

Is there a way, however, to understand this broader, fourth use of *ekklēsia* that guards the inclusiveness and universality of the church and goes beyond our three main expressions, but avoids the weaknesses in the traditional view? Yes. O’Brien (1999:146) offers a refreshing alternative,

It is better to understand the term metaphorically of *a heavenly gathering* around Christ in which believers already participate (cf. Heb. 12:22–24). The readers of the letter have already been ‘blessed . . . in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ’ (1:3), and God has made them alive with him, raised them up with him, and seated them in the heavenly realms in Christ (2:5–6). To speak of ‘church’ as a gathering taking place in heaven where believers are already assembled around Christ is a metaphorical way of saying that they now enjoy fellowship with him. It is a figurative manner of speaking about Christians being personally related to Christ as they are related to one another. And Paul’s point in the immediate passage is that Christ’s headship over the universe is for the benefit of his people who gather around him in fellowship.

The attraction of O’Brien’s view is that it captures the themes in Ephesians 1–3 about the Christian’s spiritual blessings, the “in Christ” emphases, the resurrection believers have already experienced, and their heavenly session with Christ now. It preserves the sense of gathering implicit with the word *ekklēsia*.¹⁹

Robert Banks (1994:38–40), whom O’Brien cites, presents the same position, seeing this heavenly reality in Paul’s later letters (like Colossians and Ephesians) as “an extension of Paul’s understanding of *ekklēsia*.” Banks rejects the notion of “an ‘invisible church’ consisting of all those who are in Christ, whether living or not, to which the genuine members of ‘visible churches’ also belong. This notion, though it has held a long and respected position in Christian thought, has no basis in Paul’s teachings.” Banks (1994:40) then unpacks several passages in Galatians and Philippians, showing that the believer is Christ is already part of a heavenly commonwealth/citizenship. When we come to Colossians and Ephesians, the image shifts semantically from inclusion in a heavenly “commonwealth” (variants of *polis*) to inclusion in a heavenly “church” (our fourth use of the term *ekklēsia*).

¹⁹ Allison (2012:63–64) objects that O’Brien “illegitimately restricts the semantic range” of *ekklēsia* and fails to consider that the term can have a broader sense of the church as the body of Christ for which Christ dies, which Christ is building, etc. But that begs the question of whether *ekklēsia* does (Banks, O’Brien) or does not consistently carry some sense of gathering or assembly (albeit heavenly) in the passages that O’Brien addresses.

So in Colossians we are introduced to the idea of a nonlocal church of whom Christ is the head (Col 1:18, 24). This notion is generally misinterpreted as a reference to the “universal church” that is scattered throughout the world. It is not an earthly phenomenon that is being talked about here, but a supernatural one. The whole passage in which the expression occurs focuses on the victorious Christ and his kingdom of light that believers have now entered (1:9–2:7). . . . The picture Paul draws here is of a *heavenly assembly* within which the Colossian Christians are already participating. . . . (Banks 1994:40).

Banks then turns to Ephesians, noting that believers have been blessed in the heavenly realms (1:3) and have been made alive together with Christ and are now seated with him in heavenly places (2:5–26). Banks (1994:40–41) then observes,

Between these two passages, at the end of a celebration of Christ’s heavenly authority, reference is again made to his headship over the *ekklēsia* (1:22–23). Here again we see church taking place in heaven and Christians participating in it, even as they go about the ordinary tasks of life. Metaphorically speaking they are gathered around Christ, that is, they are enjoying fellowship with him. . . . The emphasis falls upon the completed action of Christ and its immediate heavenly implications.

Based on these exegetical observations, Banks (1994:41) concludes, “According to Paul therefore, Christians belong both to a heavenly church that is permanently in session and to a local church that, though it meets regularly, is intermittent in character.”

How does this second understanding view the relationship between a local church (household or citywide) and the heavenly church? O’Brien (1999:147) answers,

Although the link is nowhere specifically spelled out, it seems that local congregations, as well as house-groups that meet in particular homes, are concrete, visible expressions of that new relationship which believers have with the Lord Jesus. Local gatherings, whether in a congregation or a house-church, are earthly manifestations of that heavenly gathering around the risen Christ (cf. Heb. 10:25). Therefore, here as elsewhere in Ephesians (e.g., 3:10), the apostle also has in mind local congregations of Christians, in which Jews and Gentiles are fellow-members of the body of Christ and concrete expressions of this heavenly entity.

Given this relationship, a vital implication emerges for our understanding of the one-another ministry of the local church. As believers seek to love, serve, and care for one another, they are doing so as active participants in a larger phenomenon, as those united to and empowered by (Eph 1:18–23) the risen, reigning Christ who is present by his Spirit.

5. Hebrews 12:22–23. The unnamed writer addresses his largely-Jewish readership with words that highlight the greater glory of the new covenant into which they have entered through Christ. In contrast to God’s terror-producing appearance on

Mount Zion, he writes, “But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.”

The traditional understanding—the first view under 2 above—of the universal church cites this passage to the effect that universal church includes both deceased and living believers in both the Old Testament and New Testament (Grudem 2004:854; Erickson 2013:957). In this view, deceased Old Testament believers and Christian believers together belong to the church of the firstborn. But this passage seems better understood by the second view above, i.e., the universal church as a heavenly gathering in union with Christ. Noting the parallel use of *ekklēsia* in Hebrews 2:12, O’Brien (2010:485) writes, “it is best to understand *the church of the firstborn* as referring to ‘the whole communion of saints.’ All the people of Christ are the ‘firstborn’ children of God, through their union with him who is the Firstborn *par excellence*.” After dismissing a less likely interpretation, Bruce (1990:358) agrees, “More probably the reference is to the whole communion of saints . . . enrolled as citizens of heaven. To this community believers have come—not merely into its presence (as they have come into the presence of angels innumerable), but into its membership.”

Beyond connecting Old Testament and New Testament believers into one universal *ekklēsia*, this passage also preserves the sense of church as “assembly.” Commentator William Lane (1998:468) adds, “The reference sustains the note of joy and fellowship in worship introduced with verse 22b and indicates that the redeemed take their place in the festive assembly at Zion.” The picture emerges of a transcendent, earthly-heavenly assembly of angels and of living believers (the readers) and deceased believers (now in heaven) worshiping together in some kind of spiritual union. One can argue in light of Hebrews 12:22–23 that the universal church is in constant assembly with Christ in heaven and joins mystically with the local church on earth when the local church assembles.

This sense of assembly does not escape Ferguson’s eye in his discussion of the universal church, although he envisions Hebrews 12:22–23 as a future, actual, eschatological assembly (1996:132).

The idea of assembly is not lost even in the extension of the word to the universal people of God, for in the background is the eschatological assembly of all the saved, which is described by different but kindred expressions (2 Thess. 2:1; Matt. 24:31); and perhaps the eschatological gathering is intended once by *ekklēsia* itself (Heb. 12:23). There will be a time when the universal church is in

assembly, when the Lord comes again. That eschatological “Day” gives urgency to the earthly meetings together of Christians (Heb. 10:25), which exemplify and anticipate the final gathering.

While the metaphorical, mystic approach seems to best fit the contexts of Hebrews (and Ephesians and Colossians), the Bible does teach in various places the reality of a future eschatological fulfilment. Whether this earthly-heavenly church connection is mystical-metaphorical or future-eschatological, or both, this passage shows the assembly nature of even the universal church. And in this sense, with the exception of the one or two references to a regional church that doesn’t gather together—we can further define the *ekklēsia* as a group of people who belong to Jesus Christ and who in some sense do assemble together with one another in his name.

Before leaving the subject of the four New Testament ways that Christ’s *ekklēsia* manifests itself, we must ask whether we should view the first three uses—the household, citywide, and regional churches—as merely parts or subsets of the one church or as the church in its fullest sense. For example, was the church that met in Nympha’s home deficient and in some sense less than a full church merely because there were other members of other household churches not present? Was the full presence of Jesus Christ by his Spirit lacking? Erickson’s (2013:956–957) perspective is helpful:

We should note that the individual congregation, or group of believers in a specific place, is never regarded as only a part or component of the whole church. The church is not a sum or composite of the individual local groups. Instead, the whole is found in each place. Karl Schmidt says, “We have pointed out that the sum of the individual congregations does not produce the total community or the church. Each community, however small, represents the total community, the church.” Coenen comments in a similar vein: “In the Acts too [as in Paul] the *ekklēsia* is ultimately one. Admittedly, it appears only as it gathers in particular places (cf. 14:27). But it always implies the totality!” First Corinthians 1:2 is of special help to us in understanding this concept. Paul addresses this letter “To the church of God in Corinth” (see also 2 Cor. 1:1). Note that he is writing to the church as it is manifested or appears in one place, namely, Corinth. “It is one throughout the whole world and yet is at the same time fully present in every individual assembly” (Coenen).

Wherever and whenever the church meets in its various expressions above, the fullness of Christ and his Spirit is present and no needed graces are lacking that would prevent even the smallest household church from being the church Jesus wants it to be and from carrying out the ministries of mutual Christian care.

2.3 Select Images of the Church that Highlight Mutual Ministry

How did the New Testament writers view the church? One of the best ways to understand the church is through the many and varied images of the church that they present. The options are numerous. For example, in his classic work, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, Paul S. Minear summarizes ninety-six pictures of the church.

How shall we narrow our focus? For the purpose of our focus on mutual care, we will consider three images that appear at various places in the New Testament and that suggest implications for the mutual ministry of church members. In chapter three we will consider an additional image relevant to our thesis, the church as the dwelling place of God's Spirit.

2.3.1 The Body of Christ

One of the Apostle Paul's favourite metaphors for the church is the body of Christ (*sōma Christou*) (Erickson 2013:959). Yet here we must distinguish two primary ways Paul uses this metaphor. As R. Y. K. Fung (1993:78–82) explains, “Two stages may be distinguished in Paul's use of the body concept in reference to the church: it is used largely as a simile in 1 Corinthians and Romans (the church is like a body), and as a metaphor in Colossians and Ephesians (the church is the body of which Christ is the head)” (cf. Grudem 2004:858–859).

We will consider both of Fung's stages. First, and most importantly for our focus on mutual ministry, Paul uses the metaphor of the whole body with its various parts to picture the interrelationship between members of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12, he announces to the believers, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (12:27). This summary statement concludes his sustained argument in the previous context to show that each of them—despite their ethnic and socio-economic diversity—is a part of the one body of Christ (12:12–14) and that each body part has a different, but significant and indispensable, ministry function within that body (12:15–26). While the power to minister comes from God (12:4–6), the passage focuses on the horizontal relationships of mutual care of members for each other (12:25). The body of Christ metaphor entails “interconnectedness” (Erickson 2013:960).

Romans 12 presents a similar analogy between the many body parts of the one human body and the various Christian members of the one body of Christ: “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the

same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (12:4–5). The metaphor wonderfully blends diversity and unity. Different kinds of people—Jew and Gentile (diversity)—belong to one body by the work of the one Spirit (unity), yet function differently (diversity).

We will return to these passages in chapter three as we consider the Spirit’s work of gifting and empowering believers to serve one another. But Grudem’s conclusion is worth noting since it directly supports our mutual ministry thesis, “The metaphor of the church as the body of Christ should increase interdependence on one another and our appreciation of the diversity of gifts within the body” (Grudem 2004:859).

The second variant of the body of Christ metaphor focuses on the vertical relationship of the church as one body to the head of the body, Jesus Christ. The individual body parts in relationship to one another are not in view, only the body as a whole. In the middle of Paul’s exalted praise of Christ Jesus in Colossians 1:15–20, he declares, “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” In Colossians 2:18, Paul warns the readers to not be deceived by false teachers. From where does their deception arise? Verse 19 gives the diagnosis, “They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” As Fung (1993:79) notes,

The metaphor brings out the new element of growth: Christ as the head of the body is here the source of the body’s growth. . . . The idea which follows of the whole body being knit together and growing together is appropriate in view of the fact that headship involves direction and control. . . . Thus in Colossians the use of the body metaphor differs from that in the earlier letters in that the explicit application to the believers’ mutual relationship is dropped . . . and in its place are introduced the headship of Christ and the growth of the church as a living organism.

In Ephesians 1:22–23, this headship not only includes the church but includes ruling over everything *for* the church. “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” From this fullness Christ the head fills his body, providing the church with his power to fulfil Paul’s prayer in 1:15–19. Based on the analogies of Christ/the church and husbands/wives in Ephesians 5:21–33, Christ’s headship over his body, the church, implies leadership (5:23–24), sacrificial love (5:25–28), nurture and care (5:29–30), and oneness and union (5:31–32).

In light of these insights from Colossians and Ephesians, Fung (1993:81) concludes,

Christ as the head is not only united with the church, his body, as the source of its life, but also stands over it as its absolute ruler (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22–23; 4:15; 5:23) and fills it with all the resources of his power and grace (Eph 1:23). The church grows as its members are properly related to Christ the head and to one another as members of the same body (Col 2:19; Eph 4:16).

We see, therefore, that the body of Christ metaphor carries both a horizontal dimension—the mutual relationships among church members within the body—and a vertical dimension—the relationship between Christ the head and the church as his body. In *One Body in Christ*, Ernest Best draws the same conclusions. Referring to the “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) so prominent in Paul, Best (1955:7) writes,

The formula describes the relationship of the believer to Christ. That it describes a relationship of personal fellowship between Christians and Christ has been recognized ever since Deissman first discussed the formula. But it does more; it implies a relationship of Christians one to the other in personal fellowship and all together to Christ. It is not individualistic but social in its implications. . . . The Christian is related to Christ, but so also are other Christians, and because of that a mutual relationship exists between Christians themselves, and they are expected to treat one another in special ways.

In Christ, believers are united to him and to each other. And that one-another relationship differs from relationships with those outside of Christ.

More particularly it is exceedingly doubtful if all the content of the phrase ‘in Christ’ can be explained by reference to the death and resurrection of the believer with Christ; it leaves unexplained the social side of the phrase. Christians are not alone in Christ; they are brought into a relationship with other Christians which is different from their relationship to non-Christians; in Christ they are brothers; in Christ they exhort and beseech one another; in Christ wives are in subjection to their husbands. (1955:18)

Best (1955:20) expands on this a few pages later, explaining that this new relationship with one another in the one body of Christ creates unique attitudes toward each other and entails mutual duties, fitting well our thesis.

The attitude which a Christian adopts to those others who are in Christ will differ from his attitude towards those who are not in Christ; there will be certain duties which he owes to those in Christ which he does not owe to others. . . . He will also stand in a certain relationship towards others who are in Christ which will differ from the relationship he has with those who are not in Christ . . . ; they are brethren, and together they form a unit, a whole. It is as if a line were drawn round those who are in Christ separating them from those who are not; within the area created by this line mutual duties, attitudes, and relationships hold which are not true of what lies outside the area. To be in Christ is to be in this area with all the duties, relationships, and privileges that go with it.

It is this social dimension of being together as one body in Christ that encourages and necessitates the ministry of mutual care.

We close this consideration of the body of Christ metaphor with a concluding observation from Fung (1993:81) that directly addresses our thesis.

The body of Christ is usually the locus of the Christian ministry. The gift of evangelism, indeed, is orientated toward outsiders, and the work of “showing mercy” (Rom 12:8) is a service which reaches beyond the confines of the Christian fellowship. But there can be no denying that Paul’s emphasis in speaking of the ministry rests on how the ministry should serve the church and not on how it should serve the world, and that the stated purpose of the church’s being equipped by the ministry is not that it may serve the world but that it may upbuild itself (Eph 4:12, 16).

While a well-functioning, mutually-loving church body can attract outsiders, and God certainly calls his people to minister to those who need Christ, the focus of the body metaphor in each passage above is not about outreach but about ministry toward one another. As Edmund C. Clowney similarly concludes in *The Church* (1984:80), the image concerns “the collective growth and maturing of the church in the life of Christians together.”

2.3.2 The Family of God

The church as family and its related familial metaphors fill the New Testament. Along with the body metaphor above, these are vital backdrops for the mutual ministry of church members.

Where did the imagery begin? We can turn to Jesus’s descriptions of his followers as brothers and sisters to each other. He tells his disciples in Matthew 23:8–9 that they should not assume the title Rabbi because they have one Teacher (Jesus) and one Father, and “you are all brothers.” In Mark 10:29–31, Jesus comforts his disciples as they prepare for a life of sacrifice. Even if they must leave their homes and family or be rejected by family members (Luke 14:25–27; Matt 10:34–37), they will receive a hundredfold blessing in this present age that will include new homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, etc. In Luke 22:31–32 he tells Peter that Peter will be tested severely by Satan (presumably referring to Peter’s threefold denial) but after that happens, that he should strengthen his “brothers,” his fellow disciples.

Furthermore, Jesus not only viewed the disciples as brothers and sisters to each other, but also as his own brothers and sisters. In John 20:17, as Mary sees the risen

Jesus and clings to him, Jesus directs her, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” If the disciples are Jesus’s brothers and if Mary and Jesus have the same Father, then we can infer that Jesus saw himself, Mary, and all the disciples, in some sense, as brothers and sisters, children of the same heavenly Father.²⁰

Moreover, Jesus not only looks at his followers as his new family and directs them to do the same, he prioritizes this new family over his biological family. When informed that his earthly mother and brothers wanted to speak to him, Jesus replied to the messenger, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Then, referring to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:46–50; parallel Mark 3:31–35; Luke 8:19–21).

Three “family” observations flow from these Gospel passages: (1) Jesus and his followers have a common Father and they are, in some sense, siblings with each other. (2) Jesus treasures these new family relationships above his bloodline relationships. (3) Jesus wants his followers to adopt the same priority view of their relationships with him, with his/their Father, and with each other as brothers and sisters.

In his provocative book, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community*, Joseph H. Hellerman argues that Jesus and his apostles placed a higher value on church relationships than marriage and family relationships. Commenting on several of the above passages and criticizing ways contemporary Christians soften their force, Hellerman (2009:64) writes,

Jesus radically challenged His disciples to disavow primary loyalty to their natural families in order to join the new surrogate family of siblings He was establishing—the family of God. Relationships among God’s children were to take priority over blood family ties. This is the most reasonable way to read the anti-family traditions in the Gospel narratives and still preserve their prophetic thrust.

For Christians, their primary, strong-group relationships lie within their new family, the church.

²⁰ Jesus does not tell us in what sense he, Mary, and the disciples share God as their Father. We could assume, based on other passages, that Jesus as God relates to the God the Father in terms of their respective Trinitarian roles, while the disciples relate to God the Father in terms of their adopted sonship status based on God’s redemptive work in Christ (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–7). But Jesus here states their common connection to the same Father.

Christ's followers seemed to grasp their Lord's perspective. In the book of Acts, Luke frequently refers to Christians as brothers and sisters²¹ in his narration of events (Acts 1:15;²² 11:29; 14:2; 16:40; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17; 28:14, 15). He also records the apostles and other believers calling each other brothers and sisters (Acts 1:16; 6:3; 9:17; 11:12; 12:17; 15:7, 13, 23; 21:20; 22:13). While the apostles did address Jewish leaders as "brothers" (i.e., ethnic kinfolk) in formal addresses, Luke describes these Jewish leaders as "Jews" and reserves the family language only for describing Christians.

What about the epistles? Referring to the New Testament books after Acts, Ferguson (1996:119–120) summarize the brothers/sisters usage this way:

Even leaving aside references to individual persons in the singular as a spiritual brother, the religious use of "brothers" in the plural for the new spiritual family of God surfaces in all the remaining books of the New Testament except Titus, 1 Peter (which has "brotherhood"—2:17; 5:9), and 2 John. Paul, in his heaviest concentration of the terminology, refers to brothers in 1 Thessalonians nineteen times. The usage is in all an impressive testimony to the prevalent sense of closeness and unity in the early church.

The Apostle Paul defines relationships with a familial structure. God is the Father of his children (Eph 3:14) and believers in Jesus are his sons and daughters (2 Cor 6:18). Paul routinely addresses his Christian readers as brothers and sisters. Older women are like mothers, older men are like fathers, younger women are like sisters, and younger men are like brothers (Titus 5:1–2). Branick (1989:16) observes,

The frequency of family and household terminology in Paul for the Christian community is striking. He addresses or refers to his fellow Christians as "brother," *adelphos*, 114 times, expressing the basic relationship that should hold sway among believers.

In support of our thesis, as we will see in chapter four, the New Testament writers often link the "brother and sister" appellation to specific one-another mutual ministry commands. For example, Paul pleads with the divided Corinthians,

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers

²¹ I agree with the translation philosophy of the NIV 2011: Unless the context requires a gender restriction, translating the Greek noun *adelphoi* as "brothers and sisters" most accurately captures—for twenty-first century English readers who are decreasingly familiar or comfortable with generic masculine terms—the biblical author's inclusive intent.

²² For some reason, NIV 2011 translates *adelphoi* as believers in verse 15 and not as brothers and sisters, missing the familial emphasis, although they do it correctly in verse 16.

and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you." (1 Cor 1:10–11)

Or consider his exhortation to the Galatians to care for those who struggle with sin, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (Gal 6:1).

Hellerman (2009:78–79) helpfully summarizes Paul's use of family imagery with four headings:

1. Affective Solidarity: the emotional bond that Paul experienced among brothers and sisters in God's family.
2. Family Unity: the interpersonal harmony and absence of discord that Paul expected among brothers and sisters in God's family.
3. Material Solidarity: the sharing of resources that Paul assumed would characterize relationships among brothers and sisters in God's family.
4. Family Loyalty: the undivided commitment to God's group that was to mark the value system of brothers and sisters in God's family.

For each of these headings, Hellerman cites and unpacks key Pauline passages. We will explore several of these in chapter four. It is sufficient for now for our purposes to see how important this family metaphor is for the mutual care of church members.

We see the same centrality of the sibling metaphor in other epistles. In Hebrews 2:10–18, the writer describes that God's redemption plan to bring many sons and daughters to glory (v. 10), fulfilling Psalm 8's vision of a glorious humanity (vv. 5–8). This plan required the Redeemer to be made like that humanity in every way. As verse 11 says, referring to Jesus and Jesus's people, "Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters." Verses 12–13 then buttress that statement with three Old Testament passages that each present a familial image that the Hebrews writer treats as prophetic. Based on this familial connection between Jesus and his people, verses 14–18 show how Christ's incarnation underlies his suffering, redemption, and high priestly ministry for his people. And in his last chapter, the writer bases his exhortation in 13:1 on the members' family identity, "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters" (13:1).

Likewise, James exhorts his readers in James 4:11, "Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another." Peter uses the term *philadelphian* (often translated as brotherly love), in 1 Peter 1:22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart." In 2:17 the same apostle urges, "Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of

believers, fear God, honour the emperor,” and in 3:8 we read, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” The Apostle John also employs the sibling metaphor to call his readers to love each other, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister” (1 John 4:20–21). The book of Revelation concludes the Bible using the same familial metaphor in several places (1:9; 6:11; 12:10; 19:10).

How does this image contribute to our understanding of church members ministering to and caring for one another? At the risk of stating the obvious, “the fact that the church is like a family should increase our love and fellowship with one another” (Grudem, 2004:859). The passages above address church members explicitly as brothers and sisters as they appeal to the members to pursue unity (1 Cor 1:10–11), to care for those who trapped in sin (Gal 6:1), to not slander each other (Jas 4:11), and to love one another continually (Heb 13:1) and deeply (1 Peter 1:22). Moreover, this sibling-to-sibling love is an indispensable mark of true conversion, an evidence that one truly knows and loves the unseen God (1 John 4:20–21).

In light of the actual usage of family language in countless New Testament passages, one wonders how a systematic theologian like Michael Horton (2011:724) can include the category of “Family” as an important ecclesiological image and spend three paragraphs discussing it, yet make no reference to the brother-sister relationships. Horton’s thrust is entirely vertical. He focuses on the role of the one Father over the household, the Son who is the elder brother and legal heir over the estate, and believers who share in that Son’s inheritance. But he stipulates nothing about the sibling relationship between church members and the mutual care it entails.

2.3.3 God’s New Priesthood

In Exodus 19:4–6, God spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, promising to make Israel a special people, including a kingdom of priests,

This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Yet this covenantal commitment by God was conditioned upon the nation's faithfulness and obedience. As we see throughout the Old Testament, Israel as a nation failed to fulfil that condition. Yet God kept the promise alive through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 61:5–6 and 66:20–21, as Isaiah looked forward to a new covenant (see also Mal 1:10–11). By grace, God preserved a remnant who lived by faith, and from that remnant came forth the Messiah Jesus.

How then did this promise of a nation of priests find fulfilment? The Apostle Peter describes how the New Covenant fulfilled this promise in the people of that Messiah, based on Christ's death, "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:4–5). The Old Testament temple is gone; the church has become God's new temple, the place where God not only meets with his people but also the body that carries out God's new covenant priestly sacrifices. In verses 6–8 Peter cites Old Testament passages that teach that Israel has failed and that Jesus has become that special cornerstone of God's new temple. He then makes an explicit connection between the Exodus 19 Sinai promises and the church of Christ in verses 9–10,

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

The Apostle John reinforces this identity in his opening doxology in Revelation 1, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen" (1:5–6; see also 5:10; 20:6).

What are the "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet 2:5) that these believers in Christ offer? We can identify at least five explicit expressions in the New Testament letters:

1. Believer-priests offer to God their bodies and their entire beings (understanding "bodies" as a synecdoche for the entire person), Romans 12:1.
2. Believer-priests offer to God people who have become converts to Christ, through their evangelistic ministries, Romans 15:15–17.
3. Believer-priests offer to God their financial gifts to support the gospel ministry, Philippians 4:14–19.
4. Believer-priests offer to God their praise, 1 Peter 2:9–10; Hebrews 13:15.
5. Believer-priests offer to God their good works of sharing with others, Hebrews 13:16.

While each of these includes a Godward component, the last one occupies our interest because it focuses on mutual ministry. Hebrews 13:16 says, “And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” In the Greek text, both “do good” and “share” are nouns and both suggest acts of kindness and sharing of material possessions (O’Brien 2010:528). Ellingsworth (1993:721) concurs, “There is indeed so much overlap of meaning between εὐποιΐα and κοινωνία in this context that the two terms may be treated as a virtual hendiadys, referring to the practice of doing good to fellow-Christians.” Earlier in the chapter the apostle gave some examples of ways to do good. As believer-priests, his readers should continue to love one another (v. 1), to show hospitality to strangers (v. 2, same verb *mē epilanthanesthe* in verse 16), and to remember with sympathy those who are in in prison and those who are suffering mistreatment (v. 3). For the Hebrews writer, persevering in faith—a mega-theme in Hebrews—includes persevering in love and good deeds (10:23–25).

While the Levitical priesthood has ended, Jesus the new High Priest has inaugurated a new priesthood in which his people fulfil the Exodus 19 vision by offering sacrifices to God that include good works done toward one another.

2.3.4 The Value of These Images

As theologians quickly remind us, “the wide range of metaphors used for the church in the New Testament should remind us not to focus exclusively on any one” (Grudem 2004:859; also Horton 2011:733; Clowney 1984:64; Minear 2004:222; and others). The three images above—the church as body, family, and priesthood—are merely some that we see in the New Testament. Moreover, the many New Testament church images sometimes appear together. Fung (1993:80–81) notes this in the book of Ephesians:

The building of the temple grows (Eph 2:21) while, conversely, the body is built up (Eph 4:16, cf. 4:12). In Ephesians 5:22–33, with the concept of bodily union providing the link (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31), the figure of the church as the bride of Christ is supplemented by that of the body. . . . The mingling of metaphors may indicate that no one metaphor is sufficient by itself to convey the total message concerning the nature and function of the church.

While no single image, or even the three above together, are sufficient to fully capture the New Testament’s picture of the church, each image carries value. Each can help Christians “appreciate more of the richness of privilege that God has given us by incorporating us into the church” (Grudem 2004:859). In particular, the three images

above—body, family, and priesthood—clearly remind the church of one of its central functions in the New Testament, as we saw in chapter one, namely, its mutual care ministry. With Minear, Clowney, Fung, and others, we can reasonably assume that these New Testament images helped the members of the church to form a corporate, self-conscious identity as mutual caregivers. Clowney (1995:64) puts it this way, “As we have seen, a model offers a redescription of reality. It offers organization that incorporates what is known and by analogy suggests exploration that promises new understanding.” These images of the church motivated the members to initiate one-another ministries as they read of God’s will for them to serve one another. As the Spirit moved them and empowered them to serve, these biblical identities reinforced their Spirit-empowered actions and helped motivate their care ministries. Mutual care would seem perfectly proper when members see themselves as part of the same body, as brothers and sisters in the same family, and as priests doing good deeds for one another.

2.4 Conclusion

We saw in chapter one that systematic theologians largely have neglected the mutual ministry aspect of the church, a prominent aspect in even a cursory reading of the New Testament writings. That led us to this chapter where we explored more carefully the meaning and nature of the church. The word church has been and continues to be understood in various ways on both popular and scholarly levels. Yet a more careful understanding of the term *ekklēsia* in the New Testament reveals four expressions of it in the New Testament writings: the household church, the citywide church, the regional church, and the universal church, with the first two being most frequent. In terms of actual ministry practice, the universal church and regional church, since they do not meet, yield little insight.

While we do not know with certainty where or how often citywide churches met, we do know that household churches met regularly, and it is in this smaller, life-on-life setting that one-another ministry would most naturally occur. As Banks (1994:36) observes,

In any event we must not think of these various types of community groups as particularly large. Certainly there is no suggestion that, as in the synagogue, ten had to be available before they could commence their gatherings. Even the meetings of the “whole church” were small enough for a relatively close relationship to develop between the members. So long as they preserved their household setting, this was bound to be the case.

In the household church setting the members could best know each other's needs, struggles, weaknesses, and strengths, and most wisely and directly serve each other. It is difficult to imagine how the kind of mutual ministry pictured in the New Testament could occur in churches larger than the size of the household churches.

Furthermore, it seems that in the intimate fellowship of the household church its members can best reflect the three images that we explored in the last part of this chapter—the body, the family, and the priesthood. In the household church, the members could most effectively serve one another as fellow members of the same body, using their differing gifts and functions to help each other in specific ways, just as the various parts of the human body function harmoniously in a healthy body. In the household church, the members could most easily express their brother-sister relationships as the one family of God meeting together with one another, prioritizing God's new family into which God joined them. Moreover, members in the household church could most directly serve one another as believer-priests, offering to God sacrifices of praise, worship, and obedience, and doing good works toward one another.

Where did the New Testament church members find the motivation, the example, and the power to minister to and care for one another? This will be our focus in chapter three.

Chapter Three

The Work of God, Jesus Christ, and His Spirit as Motivation in the Ministry of Mutual Christian Care

What motivated the members of the New Testament church to minister to one another? What models of love and care did they follow? Where did their desires, gifts, and abilities come from? What empowered them to serve each other as brothers and sisters? The answers to these questions centre on God's work in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

It is axiomatic in the New Testament writings that the power to live as a Christian comes from the triune God himself. Jesus taught this, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Paul taught the same truth, reminding the Philippians that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6), urging them to "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose" (2:12–13), and assuring them that they can do what God calls them to do "through him who gives me strength" (4:13). He assures the Corinthians that "we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). He personally testifies, "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19–20).

Likewise, the apostle Peter understood the same truth, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" (2 Pet 1:3–4). From start to finish God promises his people the ability to do his will, including the mutual ministry commands we have been considering and will continue to consider in the next chapter.

3.1 God’s Salvation in Christ as the Motive and Model for Mutual Ministry

Given the believer’s dependence on the Lord to grow and change, how does God’s saving work in Jesus Christ form the foundation and the fountain for the church’s one-another ministry? We will begin with some general perspectives (3.1.1) and then consider how God moves and guides believers to pursue mutual ministry based on his salvation stated in broad terms (3.1.2), the saving love of both the Father and the Son (3.1.3), and the self-sacrificial atonement of Jesus Christ (3.1.4).

3.1.1 General Perspectives: God’s Salvation Produces Christian Growth

One mega-theme to observe in the New Testament epistles is what theologians call the “indicative-imperative” dynamic, the direct interplay between the facts about God’s saving work and the commands God gives, and how the indicatives precede the imperatives and provide a logical basis or motive for the imperatives. We see this dynamic throughout the New Testament letters in key sections where the apostles give general exhortations for Christian growth, obedience, and progressive sanctification.²³

Consider the book of Romans, for example. Perhaps surprisingly, the first command in Paul’s letter to the Romans does not appear until 6:11, “In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” And even that command is not so much a command to act but a command to believe what Paul has just said about their union with Christ. In other words, Paul spends five and a half chapters unpacking the “gospel of God” (Rom 1:1)—telling Christians what God has done for them in Christ—before exhorting them toward ethical behaviour. Likewise, in light of God’s saving mercy in Romans 1–11 (culminating in his glorious doxology in 11:33–36), Paul writes in Romans 12:1–2, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice” and to “not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

²³ For a discussion of the indicative-imperative dynamic see, among others, Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (1975:253); S. E. Porter, “Holiness, Sanctification,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (1993:401); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (1996:352); Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, (2010:299); and David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon* (2012:219). Arnold calls this a “characteristic tension” in Paul’s writings. Porter reminds us that this concept is a theological paradigm more than a grammatical one, since not all of the indicatives and imperatives of the Christian faith taught in the Bible are expressed grammatically in the indicative and imperative moods.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 the apostle succinctly brings together Christ’s death and resurrection with the call to live for that Saviour: “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” How does this grace motive play out in these verses? Commentators generally agree that the Greek genitive *Christou* in verse 14 should be understood as “Christ’s love for us” (a subjective genitive, as the NIV above) not “our love for Christ” (an objective genitive, as some interpret). Paul is convinced of Christ’s love for him not because of subjective feelings but because of the one-time, objective, time-and-space event of Christ’s death and resurrection (see also Rom 5:6–11). What does this conviction about the cross and resurrection do for Paul? It “compels” (*synechei*) him. While the Greek verb can carry the notion of either constraining or restraining, Murray J. Harris (2005:419) offers helpful insight,

The rendering that best captures this dual notion of constraint and restraint is “controls (us).” Christ’s love is a compulsive force in the life of believers, a dominating power that effectively eradicates choice in that it leaves them no option but to live for God (cf. θεῶ, v. 13a) and Christ (τῷ ... ἀποθανόντι καὶ ἐγερθέντι, v. 15b).

Grasping Christ’s compelling love—this compulsive force—drives Paul to live for him. God’s redemptive work in Christ powerfully propels the apostle forward. In fact, Paul personalizes for himself and his Christian readers the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection. Christ did not merely die and rise; he died and rose “for” (*hyper*) them, the ones who now live for him. In other words, in light of the gospel, Christians should stop living for themselves and should live instead for the one who died and rose for them.

3.1.2 Specific Examples: God’s Salvation Produces One-Another Ministries

How does God’s salvation work motivate believers toward specific one-another ministries of mutual care? While we will look at several of these specific mutual care ministries in chapter four, our purpose in this section is to show how God’s salvation work propels these ministries in the New Testament.

3.1.2.1 The call to love, provide hospitality, and care for prisoners. The epistle to the Hebrews provides a clear example of the indicative-imperative dynamic applied to mutual care ministries. While chapters 1–12 include various hortatory calls to persevere in faith, the focus in these chapters is largely doctrinal. The writer stresses the

superiority of Jesus Christ and his new covenant provisions (a better mediator, a better law, better sacrifices, a better priest, etc.) over against the old covenant provisions.

Hebrews 12 ends on a glorious theological and soteriological note, “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire’” (vv. 28–29). In Christ, the readers have now received by grace an unshakeable kingdom that produces gratitude, worship, and reverence to God.

Hebrews 13:1–3 then turns a corner to give specific applications to the church member’s daily life.

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

As Bruce (1990:367), notes, “What follows in chapter 13 resembles the usual assortment of ethical and practical admonition and personal information with which New Testament epistles tend to close.” The unnamed author addresses practical areas like loving each other, showing hospitality, protecting the purity of marriage, being free from the love of money, doing good and sharing with others, obeying elders, etc., all of which flow from the grace, wisdom, and confidence they have found in the Jesus and the new covenant he has inaugurated.²⁴

Consider, for example, the command in 13:1 to “love one another as brothers and sisters.” Peterson (2010:505) notes several indicatives throughout the epistle that inform this particular imperative.

The author has already provided good grounds for urging his listeners, ‘Let brotherly love remain’. Their privileged membership in God’s family with all that this entails has been underscored throughout the discourse and is reason enough for them to respond positively to the needs of others in the family. They are the many ‘sons and daughters’ whom God in his gracious plan is bringing to glory (2:10). Jesus is not ashamed to call them *brothers and sisters* (2:11–12). As the exalted One who speaks from heaven, he addresses them as ‘*the children God has given me*’ (v. 13). Jesus the heir of all things (1:2) firmly takes hold of them, Abraham’s descendants (2:16), in order to lead them to their inheritance.

²⁴ Based on the writer’s own description of his letter as a “word of exhortation” (*tou logou tēs paraklēseōs*) in Hebrews 13:22 and the structure and style of the letter, Dennis Johnson argues (2007:171–178) that the epistle to the Hebrews provides us with the clearest New Testament example of a sermon addressed to Christians. (For the most part, the sermons summarized in Acts address the unchurched.) Johnson suggests this sermon provides a model on how to preach the indicative-imperative dynamic.

Even when they are tempted to lose heart because of their sufferings, God speaks to them as ‘children’. He urges them not to make light of his discipline since he chastens everyone that he loves and accepts them as *sons and daughters* (12:5–6). His discipline is clear evidence that they are his children (vv. 7–10).

The family established by God the Father and Jesus the Elder Brother compels the members of the church to view and treat one another as brothers and sisters.

3.1.2.2 The call to use one’s gifts to serve one another. We saw in Romans 12:1–2 above, in general terms, that believers should “offer their bodies as a living sacrifice” and “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” because of God’s saving mercy in Christ. From that general call to holiness in verses 1–2, Paul moves to the specific application in verses 3–5 of what redeemed thinking entails (Moo 1996:759; Dunn 1998:719) and in verses 6–8 of how members of the body should exercise their gifts.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

From the foundation of saving grace that his readers have received, Paul exhorts them to use their spiritual gifts humbly, by faith, to serve one another. (We will return to this passage later in this chapter when we address the gifts of the Holy Spirit.) In verses 9–21 Paul gives further practical instructions on how to minister both to each other and to one’s enemies. All of these many commands ultimately flow from the indicatives of God’s saving mercy in Christ.

3.1.2.3 The call to demonstrate humble, gracious relational qualities and to pursue church unity and peace. We find a third set of one-another ingredients of mutual care—flowing from God’s saving grace and demonstrating the same indicative-imperative dynamic—in passages like Ephesians 4:2–3 and Colossians 3:12–15.

With one exception—the command in Ephesians 2:11–12 for the readers to remember what they were formerly like in their lost, darkened, and hopeless

condition—Ephesians 1–3 consists solely of indicative sentences summarizing God’s saving acts. Then in 4:1 Paul pivots forward to give imperatives (along with more indicatives) about how the readers should live in light of the salvation calling they have received, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.” The calling, of course, points us back to his densely-packed exposition of the readers’ salvation in chapter one, a salvation that can be summarized by their calling in Christ: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” (1:18). O’Brien (1999:274) captures this link succinctly in his comments on 4:1,

On the basis of God’s mighty salvation in Christ, the readers are now admonished to lead lives that are in keeping with their high destiny and calling. . . . The admonition *to live a life worthy of the calling you have received* arises out of the gracious, saving purpose of God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20), which has been presented in the first three chapters.

What does “living a life worthy of the calling” (4:1) look like? In 4:2–3 those commands concern vital relational graces: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” The remaining sections in Ephesians 4–6 call readers to various forms of ethical behaviour in light of their new in-Christ identity.

Colossians 3 also shows the direct connection between God’s saving work in Christ and God’s call for the church members to care for one another. In verses 1–4 we see the indicative-imperative interplay between the believers’ position of being raised and seated with Christ and their responsibility to fix their hearts and minds on Christ. In light of these saving realities in verses 1–4 (“therefore,” v. 5), conscious of God’s impending judgment (v. 6), and recognizing their new identity (vv. 7, 9b–11), verses 5–11 calls believers to put off sinful behaviour, including various forms of sexual sin (v. 5), anger (v. 8), and lying (v. 9a).

Then, in verses 12–15, as he does in Ephesians 4:1–3, Paul focuses more specifically on several gracious attitudes and actions of mutual ministry.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Col 3:12–15)

In light of their fourfold identity as those who have been chosen by God for salvation, set apart by God as his holy possession,²⁵ loved by God (v. 12a), and forgiven (v. 13b) by Christ (the usual meaning of “the Lord” in Paul’s writings, per Dunn 1996:231 and others), Paul calls them to put on the relational graces of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (v. 12b), to bear with and forgive one another (v. 13), to love one another (v. 14), and to let Christ’s peace rule them, with gratitude (v. 15).

While we will explore several of these Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 attitudes and actions later, the point to observe at this stage is the way God’s redemptive work births and guides these gracious relational qualities in the lives of believers.

3.1.3 God’s Love in Christ as the Motive and Model for Mutual Ministry

In 3.1.1 and 3.1.2 above we saw how God’s saving grace, stated in general terms, produces not only general summaries of Christian growth but also three categories of mutual ministry. We can now focus on one specific attribute that produced this salvation—God’s love, seen in both God the Father and God the Son—and how that prominent attribute leads his people to love one another. In other words, we will see how God’s greatest attitude and action toward the church—love—leads the church to carry out the greatest one-another attitude and action (as we saw in chapter one)—to love one another.

In the New Testament, the call to love one another is frequently rooted in God’s love for the church. Consider Ephesians 5:1–2, in which Paul calls his Christian readers to live a life of love, “Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” The central exhortation is twofold: to follow God’s

²⁵ I agree with biblical scholars who see the fundamental sense of *hagios* in the New Testament, especially in indicative clauses like this, to mean set apart as a special possession for special use. For example, see David G. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 136–137; John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” chapter 21 in *The Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 277–284; and D. A. Carson, *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God’s Word*, vol. 1 (Crossway, 1998), August 29 entry. In this context, the apostle reminds readers that they have a special identity of belonging to God and should therefore live out that holy identity. Theologians sometimes call this concept “definitive” or “definitional” or “positional” sanctification.

example and to walk in love. The call to love is built on the love of both God the Father and God the Son.

Consider, first, God the Father's love. The apostle calls his readers to follow God's example. But what aspect of God does Paul intend the Ephesians to imitate? The previous verse could be cited, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32). Believers should forgive others because God has forgiven them. And there are places where God's holy nature calls his people to be holy (e.g., 1 Pet 1:15–16). But verse 1 suggests that what these readers should imitate is God's love—they should imitate God "*as* dearly loved children" (emphasis added). Because they are loved by God, they should imitate this God and love each other.

Verse 2 then highlights Christ's love to support the call to walk in love, "just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." This love of Christ is self-sacrificial. As in 5:25 and Galatians 2:20 (cf. John 3:16), in an almost formulaic way, Paul pairs together the verbs "love" (*agapaō*) and "give" (*paradidōmi*) to picture Jesus's voluntary laying down his life for the church. As O'Brien (1999:354) concludes,

The model and ground for their living a life of love is Christ's love and sacrificial offering of himself. Once again a 'conformity' pattern is used, though this time in relation to Christ's saving activity, whereas in 4:32 it was of God's action in forgiving us. Here for the first time in Ephesians the love of Christ is mentioned. Previously, it was the Father's love (2:4) that was set forth as the motivation for our salvation. But the two are not at variance, as the dual reference in 4:32 shows: 'God in Christ forgave you'. By living a life of love the readers will imitate God; yet that life of love is modelled on Christ's love so signally demonstrated in the cross. Hence, the imitation of God is ultimately the imitation of Christ. Costly, sacrificial love, then, is to characterize believers in their relationships with one another.

Christ's love cost him his own life as he gave it in sacrificial death for others. It is this same sacrificial love seen in God the Father and in God the Son that the apostle urges his Ephesian readers to demonstrate toward each other.

We see the same theme in 1 John. In 1 John 3:16, the apostle describes what true love for one another should look like, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." The logic is simple: (1) Jesus perfectly shows us what love looks like ("This is how we know what love is"). (2) This love involves self-sacrifice ("Jesus Christ laid

down his life for us”). (3) Therefore, this is the required pattern for a Christian’s love for one another (“And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”).

Similarly, in 1 John 4:7–21, God’s love provides the readers with a motive and a model to love each other. The exhortation to love one another dominates the passage, forming an *inclusio* at the start (v. 7) and end (vv. 20–21), with the theme repeated in the middle (vv. 11–12). This ability to love one another comes from God and marks those who belong to God (vv. 7–8, 12). To not love one’s brother or sister is to deny God’s love (v. 11). Moreover, God’s love is demonstrated fundamentally in his act of sending Christ to die for the sins of John and his readers (vv. 10, 14). And it is God’s love for believers that precedes and motivates their love for God and their love for one another: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (v. 10). “We love because he first loved us” (v. 19).²⁶ Whether the apostle focuses on the Son’s love in dying for the readers (in 1 John 3:16) or the Father’s love in giving the Son to die for the readers (in 1 John 4:7–21), it is divine love that drives the response of human love.

3.1.4 Christ’s Self-Sacrifice as the Model for Sacrificial, Others-Centred Ministry

In the passages above we saw how both the love of God and the love of Christ, seen in the cross, furnish believers with a compelling model and motive to love others in self-sacrificial ways. We can now explore one specific aspect of Christ’s love—his humble self-sacrifice—and consider how it explicitly functions in the New Testament to call his followers to humble service toward one another.

3.1.4.1 Christ’s ministry in anticipation of the cross. In Mark 10:32–35, Jesus predicts his impending time of suffering and death at the hands of betrayers. James and John respond by asking for a prominent place in his kingdom (vv. 36–40). This provokes the other disciples to anger (v. 41). Jesus then intervenes in verses 42–45,

Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority

²⁶ Since this sentence (“We love. . . .”) in the best Greek New Testament manuscripts lacks an object, commentators vary on whether John intended the object to be God (Marshall 1978:225), one another (Thatcher 2006:484; probably Keener 1993:*en.loc.*), or some combination of both (Smalley 1989:261; Kruse 2000:169; Akin 2001:186; Stott 1988:170; Yarbrough 2008:266; Thompson 1992:*en.loc.*). The latter seems preferable since the absence of the article appears to be deliberate and because both loving God and loving one another are seen in the immediate context of verse 19.

over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

In striking contrast to those who strive for greatness by lording it over others, Jesus teaches his followers that the way to reflect true greatness is through radical servanthood. He then goes beyond the theoretical. In verse 45 he holds up himself as the greatest example of this kind of self-giving service. James Edwards (2002:326) observes,

What Jesus teaches about service and self-sacrifice is not simply a principle of the kingdom of God but a pattern of his own life that is authoritative for and transferable to disciples (so Rom 15:2–3). The “for” (Gk. *gar*) at the beginning of v. 45 is strongly purposive: disciples should adopt the posture of servants and slaves not on the basis of ethical reasoning but *because* it is the posture of the Son of Man. “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” The life to which the gospel calls believers is not an ethical system but “the way of the Lord” (1:3), of which Jesus is the pattern and incarnation (see *Pol. Phil.* 5.2).

The model of Jesus transcends a mere ethical philosophy proclaimed by some great religious leader. Serving others is wrapped up in Jesus’s very essence, posture, and purpose in coming to earth. The “did not come to . . . but to . . .” language signals intentionality. His entire mission in coming down to earth and taking on human flesh was to serve humanity in humble self-sacrifice.

This model of ministry cannot come from the secular order, but only from the unique way of Jesus, which defies the logic of this world and its fascination with dominance, control, yields, results, and outcomes. The key to the model both incarnated and commanded by Jesus is in the verbs “to serve” and “to give.” The reason why a servant is the most preeminent position in the kingdom of God is that the sole function of a servant is to give, and giving is the essence of God. (Edwards 2002:327)

While his unique work of substitutionary atonement (“give his life as a ransom for many”) cannot be replicated, that aspect in this passage merely illustrates the depth of his own self-sacrifice in verse 45: death. The principle of humble, sacrificial service can and must be repeated by each of his followers.

3.1.4.2 Christ’s ministry on the eve of his crucifixion. We see this same theme of exemplary servanthood emerge in Christ’s actions and words with those same disciples in the Upper Room on the night before his crucifixion. In John 13 we find Jesus alone with the Twelve during their Passover meal. At a certain point, Jesus “got

up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (13:4–5). Carson (1991:463) describes the scenario,

We must picture the disciples reclining on thin mats around a low table. Each is leaning on his arm, usually the left; the feet radiate outward from the table. Jesus pushes himself up from his own mat. The details are revealing: Jesus *took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist*—thus adopting the dress of a menial slave, dress that was looked down upon in both Jewish and Gentile circles (SB 2. 557; Suetonius, *Caligula*, 26). Thus he *began to wash his disciples' feet*, thereby demonstrating his claim, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Lk. 22:27; cf. Mk. 10:45 par.).

How radical was this act of servitude? While foot washing by slaves was common in the ancient Middle East, for a master to wash his slaves' feet was an unprecedented occurrence. Andreas Köstenberger (2004:405) explains,

The performance of acts of service for his teacher was considered to be a common duty of a disciple. . . . The washing of feet, however, was considered too demeaning for disciples (or even a Jewish slave) and thus assigned to non-Jewish slaves. Thus, Jesus's adoption of the stance of a (non-Jewish) slave would have been shocking to his disciples and called for an explanation. For although there are occasional exceptions featuring people other than non-Jewish slaves washing the feet of others, the washing of the feet of an inferior by a superior is not attested elsewhere in Jewish or Greco-Roman sources.

The degree of humility and love embodied in Christ's sacrificial act becomes even more stunning when we realize, based on the details of all four Gospel narratives, that Judas the betrayer was still present at this point in the evening and that his feet were among those that Jesus washed (vv. 10–11; Carson 1991:461–462). Jesus apparently was giving Judas still one more opportunity to repent and to abandon his treacherous plan. To wash the feet of the one who was about to betray Jesus to his murderers was itself an amazing display of sacrificial love.

What did the Lord's foot washing action demonstrate? We can note four lessons. First, his foot washing declared the depth of his love for his disciples: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (v. 1).

Second, Jesus's foot washing evidenced his self-awareness of his divine identity and destiny: "Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. . . . Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God" (vv. 1, 3). The readers of John's Gospel might rightly draw a parallel between Jesus's self-consciousness of his relationship with

his Father and his subsequent humble service on the one hand and his call for them to serve out of their identity as God's sons and daughters on the other hand.

Third, his foot washing symbolized the full spiritual cleansing that he had already granted to Peter and the other disciples (less Judas) and would secure through his death and resurrection: "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean" (v. 10).

Fourth, and most vital for the explicit purpose of our study, Jesus's foot washing exemplified the kind of service Jesus enjoins on his followers:

You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13:13–17)

For reasons that go beyond the scope of this thesis, along with most theologians in the history of the Christian church, we need not elevate foot washing to the level of a sacrament or ordinance of the church.²⁷ Nevertheless, as an example of the kind of lowly, menial service that disciples should do for one another, the scene remains a powerful lesson for mutual ministry within the church body. Leon Morris (1995:551) makes this application, "The point of what Jesus has said is . . . that they should have a readiness to perform the lowliest service for one another. Nothing was more menial than the washing of the feet. No act of service should be beneath them." Motivated by love for one another, and confident of their own identity as God's sons and daughters, and reminded of the extreme example of their Lord Jesus, believers can perform for one another even the lowliest act of service.

Two further passages from the Upper Room discourse in John support our theme. In John 13:34–35, Jesus tells his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The love that Jesus had shown

²⁷ Carson (1991:486) summarizes the historic position: "Two factors have prevented most Christians, rightly, from so institutionalizing footwashing. First, nowhere else in the New Testament, or in the earliest extra-biblical documents of the church, is footwashing treated as an ecclesiastical rite, an ordinance, a sacrament. . . . Wise theologians and expositors have always been reluctant to raise to the level of universal rite something that appears only once in Scripture. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the heart of Jesus' command is a humility and helpfulness toward brothers and sisters in Christ that may be cruelly parodied by a mere 'rite' of footwashing that easily masks an unbroken spirit and a haughty heart."

to this point and was about to show in the cross and resurrection (which John's readers would have understood beyond Jesus's initial hearers) is their standard. While the command to love one another was given as early as Moses (Lev 19:18), the newness of this "new" command consists in the way it has been and was about to be fleshed out in Jesus by his life of love and his sacrificial death.

Similarly, in John 15:12–13, Jesus commanded his followers, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." Among the possible ways one could measure love—the giving of time, possessions, and assistance to another person—surely nothing goes deeper than laying down one's life for another person. Jesus seizes on this reality as he not only makes himself the standard of love but does so on the eve of his own death, as he lays down his life for his own friends (cf. 10:11–18). Again, as in John 13:34–35 above, the standard for how his followers should love one another is nothing less than Jesus's own love for them. And here that meant self-sacrifice. As Carson (1991:521) notes,

The words *as I have loved you* not only remind us of the immeasurably high standard Jesus himself provides, but explicitly tie this passage to the new commandment (13:34–35), and anticipate the next verse. . . . At one level, this axiom lays out the standard of love Jesus's disciples are to show to one another; at another, it refers to Jesus's death on behalf of his friends—even if the disciples could not have understood this point when they first heard the words. . . . The saying thus becomes one of the things of which the Holy Spirit will remind them in due course (14:26). As the Lamb of God (1:29, 36), Jesus is supremely the one who gives his life for his friends (*philoï*).

The New Testament call to love one another sacrificially, as delivered first by Jesus's own words, was firmly rooted in Jesus's own self-conscious example of his sacrificial death.

3.1.4.3 Christ's death as the ultimate form of self-sacrificial service. As we move from the Gospel accounts of Jesus's teaching and his earthy service of foot washing, we turn to Philippians 2 where Paul presents a powerful call to the church to serve one another with radical others-centeredness based on God's saving grace. We find the main thrust of his exhortation in verses 1–4,

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or

vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.

The opening “Therefore” in verse 1 connects this passage back to 1:27–30, where Paul appeals to the readers to unity—to “conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel . . . (by) standing firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel,” even amid opposition (Hansen 2009:105; Fee 1995:175). Indeed, given the emphases on unity in 1:27; 2:3–4; and 4:2–3, one can argue that unity for the sake of the gospel is the major theme in the epistle. We will expand on this further in chapter four of our thesis when we address the one-another ministry of relational peace-making.

In verse 1, the apostle uses five descriptors to summarize God’s saving benefits in the lives of the Philippians, benefits designed to encourage them to minister to each other. The first three terms explicitly link the readers to their shared union with Christ and their common participation in the Spirit. The last two terms, translated as tenderness and compassion, like refer to their shared experience of God’s mercy and compassion toward them in their conversion (Fee 1995:182; O’Brien 1991:176; Hawthorne 2004:85). The “if . . . then” construction in verse 1 expresses a conditional sentence, but in this case it is a first-class condition, a grammatical condition of fact carrying the sense of “since.” In other words, verse 1 assures the Philippian believers that since they have been recipients of God’s saving grace in Christ (described in five ways), they can and must strive to live out the apodosis in verse 2.

What does Paul call them to do in light of their salvation? To make his joy complete by pursuing oneness with one another—to be like-minded, to have the same love, and to be one in spirit and of one mind (v. 2). Again, the language here echoes the vision of Philippians 1:27, “I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.” However, for this oneness to emerge, verses 3–4 require the readers to avoid self-centeredness (“selfish ambition,” “vain conceit,” “looking to your own interests”) and to practice radical others-centeredness (humbly “valuing others above yourselves” and “looking to the interests of others”).

Verse 4 raises an exegetical dilemma. The UBS4 (Aland *et.al.* 2006) Greek text reads, μή τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἕκαστος σκοποῦντες ἀλλὰ [καὶ] τὰ ἑτέρων ἕκαστοι, with the bracketed *kai* supported well by textual evidence and by the consensus of New Testament scholarship. New Testament scholars generally express two views:

The most common approach pictures Paul exhorting his readers to look *not only* for their own interests *but also* for the interests of others, implying that it is legitimate to care for themselves although the focus should nevertheless be on others.²⁸ While proponents of this position admit the first half of the verse commands readers to not look to their own interests, they see a tension with the *kai* in the second half, seeing *kai* as carrying the sense of “also.” Since Paul says that they should *also* look to the interests of others, proponents infer that the readers can (in some sense) look to their own interests. Therefore, they add a term like “merely” or “only” to the first part to resolve the tension. For example, concerning the “*kai*,” Hansen (2009:116–117) writes, “The simple word ‘and’ in Paul’s text indicates a contrast by conveying ‘not only, but also’: we are not only to pay attention to our own interests, but also to the interests of others.” O’Brien (1991:185) argues similarly, “The contrast is softened by means of the *καί*. Paul does not prohibit any interest in one’s own affairs. It is the selfish preoccupation with them that he condemns. We must love our neighbours as ourselves. . . .” William Hendriksen (1962:101) concurs, “The apostle surely implies that a believer should look to his own interests,” also citing the commandment to “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 19:19). Earle Wilson (2007:183) states it bluntly, “Paul recognizes the need for each person to care for his or her own interests. He simply insists that they should also give attention to the interests of others.” Other supporters of View #1 include Fee (1995:190–191) and Moisés Silva (2005:91).

But must we “soften” Paul’s clear command to not look to your own interests and must we add a term like “merely” or “only” to the first part of verse 4 when it is absent in the Greek text? A second approach, favoured by several commentators, understands Paul to say that believers should not look to their own interests at all but should look to the interests of others.²⁹

There are at least three reasons to prefer this second approach. First, it better preserves the Greek text by not adding words like “merely” or “only” that are not present in Paul’s original. Paul’s usual way to say “not only . . . but also,” as he does before and after our text in 1:29 and 2:27, is with a “*ou* (or *ouk*) *monon* . . . *alla kai*” construction. But there is no sense of *monon* here in Philippians 2:4a. If Paul was seeking to convey a “not only . . . but also” sense, he could have simply inserted such a

²⁸ Besides various commentators, the scholars behind the RSV, ESV, NASB95, NIV1984, NKJV, ASV, NLT, and NCV English translations express this view.

²⁹ Besides various commentators, the scholars behind the NIV, NRSV, NJB, and CEB English translations express this view.

term. Moreover, the *kai* need not carry the sense of “also” but can be understood instead as emphatic or intensive, a recognized use of *kai* by New Testament grammarians. For example, Louw and Nida (1996:811) refer to emphatic uses of *kai* and Arndt, Danker, and Bauer (2000:495–496) refer to intensive uses.

Second, this translation best fits the context and flow of the letter. Paul does not include any notion of legitimate self-care elsewhere in Philippians 2; his call to others-centeredness is radical. Rather, as verse 3 commands, the church members should “do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit” but should instead “in humility value others above yourselves.” This does not include any notion of “seeing your own value just as long as you put others before you.” Moreover, as we will see below in the selfless examples of Jesus (vv. 5–8), Paul (vv. 17–18), Timothy (vv. 20–21; note especially v. 21’s opposition to any self-interest), and Epaphroditus (vv. 25–30), the focus is entirely on pursuing the interests of others, not somehow balancing their own interests versus the interests of others.

Third, this translation best conveys the radical others-centred stress we see in other Pauline passages. In 1 Corinthians 10:24, Paul exhorts the church, “No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.” Except for the absence of *kai* in this text, both this text and Philippians 2:4 seem structurally and thematically alike: both involve a negative command (without any *monon*) followed by an adversative *alla* and a positive replacement command. After Paul urges his readers to not cause others to stumble, he testifies in 1 Corinthians 10:33, “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.” He adds in the next verse, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” In this way, Paul’s picture of Christ includes radical others-centredness. He reminds the church of this connection in Romans 15:2–3, “Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself” but bore the insults of his enemies for the good of his people. These texts admit no allowance for self-interest. Love is not self-seeking (1 Cor 13:5) but seeks to carry the burdens of others and thereby fulfil the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

Marcus Bockmuehl (1997:113–114) pinpoints the problems with the first view and provides a rationale for the second view.

Morally, Paul’s point certainly is not self-neglect or self-loathing but a genuinely unselfish investment of ourselves for the good of other people. Grammatically, it is significant to note the absence of *monon* (‘only’) from the negative clause:

Paul exhorts the Philippians to *look out not* [rather than ‘not *only*’] *for your own rights*. In the absence of *monon*, *alla kai* properly serves to denote ‘contrastive emphasis’ (Louw & Nida 1989: §91.11), meaning ‘but actually’ or ‘but rather’—not ‘but also’ (cf. similarly LXX Ezra 2:15; Job 21:17; Isa. 39:4; 48:6; Ezek. 18:11; Wisd. 14:22). Either way, then, the emphasis here is on ‘the other’, on the peace and unity of the community as achieved when its members prioritize not their own private welfare but that of their brothers and sisters (cf. Müller 86f.).

Hansen (2009:117) summarizes the view of Troels Engberg-Pedersen, that “Paul’s use of the double conjunction, ἀλλὰ καί, advocates a radical altruism: his readers should turn their attention *away from* their own interests and look *instead* to the interests of others.” Blomberg (2014) notes,

Paul knew how to write “not only” if he wanted to, and does so in 26 other places in his letters. . . . Here his point really must have been not to look to one’s own interests! After all, the context is all about Christian unity. The immediately preceding verse has just declared, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.”

Before concluding the discussion on Philippians 2:4, we should address the “love your neighbour as yourself” (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27) passage that proponents of the traditional view advance as a kind of thematic parallel to our text. Four responses seem in order: First, while there may be some theological value to cross-referencing such a statement, there are limits to how valuable a Synoptic Gospel text is to understand the exegetical nuance of a Pauline *kai* or *ἀλλὰ kai* in Philippians 2:4. Both the writers and the specific Greek constructions are different. Second, even considering the issue thematically/theologically, most Matthean,³⁰ Marcan,³¹ and Lucan³² commentators do not remark on the *ὡς σεαυτόν* phrase. And those who do so differ with one another as to its precise meaning. There are several optional nuances:

- as you *naturally* love yourself (with no comment on the morality of self-love);³³

³⁰ Morris 1992:564; Turner 2008:536; Carson 2010:522–523; Hagner 1998:647; Hendriksen 1982:809–810.

³¹ Edwards 2002:372–373; Evans 2001:264–265; Wessel & Strauss 2010:907; Cole 1989:272–273.

³² Marshall 1978:444; Bock 1994: *en. loc.*; 1996:1025; Green 1997:427–428; Liefeld & Pao 2007:198; Stein 1992:316; Garland 2012:438.

³³ R. T. France (2007:846) comments, “The text assumes, surely realistically, that it is normal to love (i.e., to be concerned for the interests of) oneself, and that such love generally takes precedence over the interests of others.” See also France (2002:480), Blomberg (1992:335), Stein (2008:561–562), and Hendricksen (1980:592; 1983:494).

- as you *legitimately, rightly* love yourself (with self-love a positive quality);³⁴
- as you *selfishly* love yourself (with self-love a sinful, self-centred trait).³⁵

Either way, of course, none of these scholars see these verses issuing some kind of positive command to love yourself, the way some modern psychologies have sought to justify various forms of self-love. There are “two” commandments in those verses, not three. Bockmuehl (1997:114) agrees,

Paul does not operate by the neo-pagan presupposition that I cannot love others until I love myself. This is not of course because he hates himself: indeed the Christian life for him takes as its very starting point the fact that Christ ‘loved me’ and ‘loved us’ (Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:37). Rather, and precisely for that reason, Paul sets out not to find himself but to find Christ—and ‘to be found in him’ (3:10). This is the only basis on which he and his readers can be freed to ‘look out for each other’s rights’.

Bockmuehl undercuts the notion that Jesus’s command to love your neighbour “as yourself” supports some form of self-interest that the traditional view of Philippians 2:4 allows. Third, we would need to understand these verses in light of various other verses in which Jesus calls hearers to deny themselves (Luke 9:23) or hate themselves (Luke 14:26), along with other verses that prohibit or condemn high self-esteem (Rom 12:3) and self-love (2 Tim 3:2).

We conclude that the second interpretation best fits the meaning of the Greek text, especially within the context of Philippians 2, but also in the rest of Paul’s writings. Believers must not look out for their own interests at all but must instead look out for the interests of their fellow church members. The radical others-centredness in verse 4 strongly reinforces the call to mutual ministry.

While Paul’s exhortation to unity in verses 2–4 is grounded in the fivefold salvation description in verse 1, it finds further reinforcement in the specific examples of radical others-centred in the rest of the chapter. Of course, the greatest example—the

³⁴ John Nolland (2005:912) observes, “The text assumes positive self-regard and the care for oneself that goes with this, and therefore that behaving towards others as though one were oneself on the receiving end will produce kindly and considerate behaviour towards them.” See also Keener (1997: *en. loc.*), Nolland (1998:584), Beale & Carson (2007:82); and Osborne (2010:883).

³⁵ William L. Lane (1974:433) notes, “In the second commandment God addresses men as they are, sinners who love themselves, and claims them as such for love to the neighbor.” James A. Brooks (1991:198) adds, “The statement ‘as yourself’ does not justify the self-love advocated by modern psychology as necessary for a healthy self-image. It merely acknowledges that human beings do love themselves—far too much in fact—and that God deserves as much—actually far more.” See also Calvin (2010:59–60) and France’s earlier work (1985:323).

example *par excellence*—that Paul displays in verses 5–11 is Jesus Christ himself. As the perfect model of humble, radical others-centeredness (v. 5), Jesus passed through several steps of humiliation: He left heaven to come to earth, he became human, he let himself be killed, and he did so by crucifixion, the most shameful form of death (vv. 6–8). As Jesus himself taught (Mark 8:31–32; 10:32–34; Luke 24:25–26, 44–46), the humiliation of incarnation and then crucifixion must precede his exaltation (vv. 9–11).

Yet Jesus is not the only one who embodies this sacrificial love and radical others-centeredness. Paul provides three more examples in the rest of the chapter. In verses 17–18, he testifies of his own self-sacrificial ministry of “being poured out like a drink offering.” Verses 19–20 describe Timothy as one who “will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ in your welfare,” words strikingly similar to verses 3–4 above. (Note: To recall our discussion on verse 4 above, here in verse 21 Paul criticizes those who “look out for their own interests”—not because they look out for their own interests *too much* but because they look out for their own interests, period.) In addition, verses 25–30 recall Epaphroditus, the messenger and gift-bearer the Philippians sent to Paul. Apparently, he nearly died because of illness (v. 27). Yet verse 26 reports his distress—not because he was ill, but because *they heard* that he was ill. So others-centred was Epaphroditus that he was more concerned about the Philippians’ response to his illness than about his own health. It is no wonder that Paul holds him up before his readers as an example of self-sacrificial ministry (vv. 29–30). In the flow of Philippians 2, these three examples in addition to Jesus’s example provide the readers with more than travelogue and human-interest stories. They are part of Paul’s careful, artful appeal to the church to practice humble, far-reaching love for each another.

To summarize, Philippians 2 calls believers to humble unity for the sake of the gospel. Based on their salvation (2:1) and encouraged by the actual models of Jesus (2:5–8), Paul (2:17–18), Timothy (2:19–24), and Epaphroditus (2:25–30), they can and must engage in radical others-centeredness (2:2–4).

Before leaving Philippians 2, we must look at verses 12–13, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.” What does Paul mean for the Philippians to “work out their salvation”? In the context of 2:1–11 (and even 1:27–2:11) and 2:14 (“Do everything without grumbling or arguing”), Paul

addresses the corporate church and calls the members to carry out his vision of humble unity and radical others-centeredness. Hansen (2009:172–173) argues persuasively,

We need to remind ourselves that his interest in this context is social harmony in the community of believers. The entire context for Paul’s imperative to *work out your salvation* has to do with unity in the church. His previous imperatives call for unity. . . . His subsequent imperative also focuses on social harmony. . . .

The plural form of the verb *work out* and the pronoun *your* can be seen as corroboration that Paul’s command should not be interpreted in a merely individualistic sense . . . but in a corporate sense as a call for the whole community to rebuild social harmony. Paul’s consistent emphasis on unity in the church in this context compels us to see that Paul’s call to *work out your salvation* has an ecclesiological reference: it is a call to restore harmony in the church by serving one another.

Hansen goes on to note that there are individual implications embedded in the corporate call. O’Brien (1991:276–280) concurs that the reference is corporate and ecclesiological, offering a lengthy detailed argument. Yet he argues that it does relate to the believer’s eternal salvation (in part because of Paul’s consistent use of *sōtērian* for eternal salvation). “Thus, we conclude that ἐαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε is an exhortation to common action, urging the Philippians to show forth the graces of Christ in their lives, to make their eternal salvation fruitful in the here and now as they fulfil their responsibilities to one another as well as to non-Christians.” Fee (1995:234–235) agrees,

The context makes it clear that this is not a soteriological text per se, dealing with “people getting saved” or “saved people persevering.” Rather it is an ethical text, dealing with “how saved people live out their salvation” in the context of the believing community and the world. What Paul is referring to, therefore, is the *present* “outworking” of their *eschatological salvation* within the *believing community* in Philippi.

Assuming this corporate interpretation best fits the context, the promise of God’s in-working in them in verse 13 offers hope to the church members. They will be able to carry out the mission of verses 2–4 with divinely-supplied power, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose” (v. 13). As Hansen (2009:177) comments,

Paul gives the builders of the Christian community in Philippi a very good reason to have supreme confidence that their work is not in vain: *for* God originally initiated, presently sustains, and ultimately will complete all their work by his indwelling power. . . . All the capabilities of God are in operation, active, and effective in the work of believers.

To further summarize Philippians 2: The apostle calls the Philippians to demonstrate radical others-centeredness (vv. 2–4) and thereby work out individually and corporately the implications of their salvation (v. 12). Several realities provide motivation and strength to enable them:

- The salvation benefits flowing from the members’ saving union with Christ and his Spirit (v. 1)
- The examples of radical others-centeredness seen in Jesus (vv. 5–11), Paul (vv. 17–18), Timothy (vv. 19–24), and Epaphroditus (vv. 25–30)
- The promise of God’s presence and active energy to give them the will and the desire to do so (v. 13)

Philippians 2, along with the other passages that we explored above, provide a powerful foundation for the mutual ministry of members caring for one another based on the self-sacrificial model of Jesus Christ and his cross.

3.2 Christlikeness as the Ultimate Goal for Mutual Ministry

There is another way in which Jesus Christ himself becomes vital for our study of mutual ministry within the church. In the New Testament, conformity to Jesus is the ultimate goal toward which believers strive in their own lives and toward which they strive to help each other.

3.2.1 Paul’s Vision of Members Pursuing Christlikeness as Their Mutual Ministry Goal

In the opening three chapters of Ephesians, Paul the apostle lays a foundation of what God has done and is doing in Christ—blessing believers in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing (1:3)—to save his people and create a new humanity, the church (Eph 2–3). Aside from one command (to remember what we once were apart from Christ, 2:11), there are no imperative verbal forms. The apostle imposes no ethical injunctions on God’s people in the entire first half of the letter.

In 4:1 Paul pivots from gospel indicatives to gospel imperatives—“to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (previously described in 1:19). What does that worthy life look like? Paul immediately focuses on relational virtues: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (vv. 2–3). The basis for this unity is then unveiled in the seven “ones” of verses 4–6: One body, one Spirit, one

hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.³⁶

Yet this unity does not mean uniformity. In fact, the way to produce a united, mature body is through the diverse expressions of Christ’s multifaceted grace exhibited through “each one of us,” every member of his body (v. 7). Citing Psalm 68, Paul sees the risen, ascended, victorious Christ pouring out gifts to his church (vv. 8–10). The gifts in this case are gifted people (v. 11). We will examine these gifts later in this chapter.

What is the envisioned outcome of the work of these people-gifts?

. . . so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Two goals continually emerge and re-emerge in these verses, as Paul weaves both strands together. First, Paul wants the church to experience unity (v. 13a, “unity”; v. 16, “the whole body . . . joined and held together”) the kind of unity that Christ purchased (2:14–18), the Spirit created (4:3); and members must strenuously seek to preserve (4:4–6). Second, Paul wants the church to experience maturity (v. 12, “the body of Christ may be built up”; v.13, “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”; v. 14, “no longer infants”; v. 15, “grow”; “the mature body of . . . Christ”; v. 16, “grows and builds itself up in love”).

How will that happen? Will it be a sudden, instantaneous transformation? No, the apostle envisions a process in which the members of the church, equipped by their pastors and teachers, will minister to one another unto growing unity and maturity. In this process, each member of the church will do his or her own part (v. 16) to bring about these goals, with the specific task of “speaking the truth in love” (v. 15).³⁷ (We

³⁶ For a summary of these seven “ones” in Ephesians 4:4–6 arranged in a helpful theological order, see Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: a Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (1996:401–404).

³⁷ Ferguson’s (1996:404–405) thorough discussion of church unity includes four items that both bring unity and express unity: (1) the one bread of the eucharist, or the Lord’s supper; (2) the one voice of common worship; (3) the one heart and one soul of life in community (chiefly related to sharing material possessions); and (4) the one

will address this specific ministry in our next chapter.)

To summarize, Paul envisions a church in which each member works together to minister to one another to build up the body of Christ in unity and maturity.

3.2.2 Paul's Example of Pursuing Christlikeness as His Ministry Goal

If this is Paul's vision for the members' one-another ministry, we might expect to see it occupy Paul's aim for his own ministry. Several Pauline passages present Christlikeness as Paul's goal for Christian growth.

In Romans 8:18–27, Paul describes the suffering that Christians face living in this fallen world. Indeed, the entire creation groans. And believers long for the final restoration of all things. In 8:28–30 the apostle unveils God's big picture plan—his sovereign purpose—for his people amid these hardships: to conform every one of his sons and daughters into the image of his Son Jesus. The apostle writes,

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

For the individual Christian, conformity to Jesus's image is not merely an individual matter. It is part of God's plan to make Jesus the firstborn of an entire new family of *many* Jesus-like brothers and sisters.³⁸ In this passage, Paul parallels conformity to Christ's image with glorification as the final goal of God's redemptive chain. Moreover, God guarantees this eternal outcome to everyone whom God foreknew, predestined, called, and justified. So certain is their final glorification that the writer uses an aorist verbal tense for God's act of glorification.

What Christians seek both for themselves and in their ministry to their brothers and sisters—Christlikeness—is God's present purpose and God's ultimate guarantee for

attitude of a unified faith. Yet he omits one specific means given in Ephesians 4:15 to bring and express unity: members together speaking God's truth, the gospel, to one another in love.

³⁸ For a fuller discussion of this theme, see Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Image Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2001). For example, Grenz writes, "Not only is Jesus the divine image but also the New Testament bears witness to the claim that he is the head of the new humanity destined to be formed according to that image in fulfilment of God's intent for humankind from the beginning. . . . God's intention is that those who are 'in Christ' participate in his destiny and thereby replicate his glorious image."

each believer. Paul ends the chapter with an assurance that nothing can thwart this all-powerful redemptive plan of God (8:31–39).

Paul expresses a similar desire for the Galatian Christians. In Galatians 4:19, he writes, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. . . .” Despite his direct, forceful rebuke in 1:6, the apostle’s concern here is motivated by deep affection and concern for these readers, his “dear children”—“a warm term of endearment” (Rapa 2008:614)—lest they be led astray by the false teachers who had already made inroads into the Galatian church.

What is Paul’s goal for them? For “Christ to be formed” in them. R. Y. K. Fung (1988:203) describes the imagery,

The verb used (*morphousthai*) refers to the process whereby the fetus develops into an infant; Paul’s desire is to see Christ thus “formed” in his converts. If the imagery suggested by the language is unusual, its intended meaning is not in doubt: to say that the image of Christ should take shape in the believers is but a more effective way of saying that “Christ should fashion them according to His own image” (W. Grundmann, *TDNT* IX: 545) that in submission to him they may reflect his image and glory in their lives.

How does becoming increasingly like Christ in 4:19 relate to the various one-another ministries in Galatians 5 and 6? In those chapters the apostle reminds the Galatian Christians that the freedom they now enjoy in Christ (5:1) can be abused by sinful self-centeredness (5:13). The antidote to selfishness and the relational destruction it brings (5:15) involves serving one another (5:14), loving one another (5:15), and bearing the fruit of Christ’s Spirit (5:22–23). All this is an expression of the work of Christ within them, as 5:24 reminds the readers, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” As Christ is increasingly formed in them (4:19 above), they in turn will increasingly reflect that through the fruit and ministries that his Spirit is producing. Moreover, as Christ is increasingly formed in them, they will demonstrate Christlikeness in restoring one another when someone is caught in sin (6:1), carrying each other’s burdens (6:2a), fulfilling Christ’s law (6:2b), and doing good to one another (6:10). Each of these reflects the character and ways of Jesus Christ and, in turn, contributes to the ultimate goal of Christlikeness, that Christ be formed in them (4:19).

The same goal drove Paul’s letter to the Colossians. He summarizes his Christ-centred ministry task this way: “Christ is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). Paul’s task is to proclaim Christ using the methods of admonition

and teaching. Moreover, his ultimate goal is to present everyone—each of the readers—fully mature in Christ. While he used birth imagery in Galatians 4:19 for his ministry objective, here he uses the language of adult maturity. As we will see in our next chapter of this thesis, Paul uses the same ministry verbs—“teaching and admonishing”—in Colossians 3:16 to describe how believers should minister to one another, so we might safely infer that he would want his readers to share the same outcome goal of Christlikeness for each other.

While these are not explicit one-another passages, we can assume that to some degree Paul was conscious that his ministry goal would be something his readers would want to adopt also. We know that the apostles Paul (Acts 20:35; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Thes 3:7–9) and Peter (1 Peter 5:3) saw themselves in at least some ways as ministry models for the congregations they served. When we add these passages to the Ephesians 4:11–16 vision above, we conclude that the apostle Paul desired church members to own the goal of helping each other become increasingly like Christ.

3.2.3 Mutual Ministry Involves Concern for Each Individual Church Member

Flowing from the above agenda, several passages show that Paul was concerned about the spiritual growth and welfare of each member. In the church’s ministry of mutual Christian care, not one member should be bypassed or neglected.

3.2.3.1 Paul’s vision of members caring for each individual member. In Paul’s extensive body metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, he recognizes that within the Corinthian church there were believers who felt inferior to others because their ministry functions and/or gifts seemed to them to be less important than the functions and/or gifts of more prominent members. Based on 1 Corinthians 14, the tongues speakers apparently saw themselves as more important than those who did not speak in tongues. Paul addressed this problem with a human body metaphor,

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (12:21–25)

While acknowledging that there are differing ministries and gifts, Paul responds in two ways. First, every part of the body, even the seemingly lesser parts, is indispensable (v. 22). Second, God grants special honour to those lesser parts, and calls the members to do the same (vv. 23–25). Each member of the body is vitally important not only for the proper functioning of the body (with “no division,” v. 25a) but for the care of each individual (“equal concern for each other,” v. 25b). Paul calls them to show attention to each fellow church member, including giving special care to those members, even the lowliest, who might be deemed as less important than others. Paul then applies this high standard of equal concern with a concrete example, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it” (12:26).

In a similar way, Paul calls believers in Romans 12:15–16 to manifest personal care for each fellow member, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.” In our next chapter, we will address the specific ministry of empathy seen in both 1 Corinthians 12:26 (“suffer . . . rejoice”) and Romans 12:15 (“rejoice . . . mourn”). At this point we simply want to see the clear call to mutual care. It is evident in these passages that the members must not neglect or bypass any fellow member. As David Garland (2003:597) comments on 1 Corinthians 12:26,

The opposite of division (σχίσμα, *schisma*) is showing care for one another (Ruef 1977: 136). Evidence of callous indifference to the plight of the “have-nots” at the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34) reveals a bodily breakdown. Their behavior at their Lord’s Supper disclosed their prejudice: these members could go missing with no great loss to the church. . . . Thiselton (2000: 1009) affirms Moltmann’s (1992) suggestion that the gift of the weaker, unrepresentable members to the church is that they give others a concrete opportunity to practice love and patience.

Every member of the church is vitally important. Care for each member is required.

To these passages, we can also add Ephesians 4:12–16 that we examined above. Paul’s vision for the body’s unity and maturation is inclusive of each member: “until we *all* reach unity . . . and become mature” (v. 13, emphasis added), “as *each* part does its work” (v. 16, emphasis added). Moreover, as we saw in chapter two, the pattern of New Testament churches being predominantly household churches makes such individual care more feasible and practical.

3.2.3.2 Paul’s exemplary concern for each individual member. Just as Paul’s model of ministry entailed the goal of Christlikeness for the members, so we can infer

that his concern for each member of the church also served as an example. We can consider several places where Paul demonstrated ministry concern for every believer.

Returning to Colossians 1:28–29, it is worth noting in this passage Paul’s emphasis on “everyone”: “[Christ] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). Bruce (1984:87) observes, “The repetition of ‘everyone’ is emphatic. No part of Christian teaching is reserved for the spiritual elite. All the truth of God is for all the people of God.” Bruce continues, capturing Paul and Timothy’s mind-set in this way,

In the proclamation of Christ we bring all wisdom within the reach of all, and our purpose is to present each believer before the face of God in a state of complete spiritual maturity. There should be no exceptions; there are no heights in Christian attainment that are not within the reach of all, by the power of heavenly grace.

We see the same Pauline emphasis on the maturation of *each* Christian in Acts 20:31, “Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.” His ministry here in Ephesus was marked not only by intense concern (“warning,” “tears”) for the church as a whole, but also by intense concern for each member of the church (“each of you”). He was also setting before his hearers, the Ephesian elders, a pattern (“Remember”) for their own ministry. As Bruce (1988:393–394) observes, “Paul urges the elders to be vigilant and to follow his own example. Let them remember how he himself had shown such careful and compassionate concern for his converts, during the three years of his residence among them, pointing out unceasingly, night and day, the right path for them to pursue.” Of course, Paul’s practice of teaching believers not only publicly but also “from house to house” (Acts 20:20) greatly enabled him to minister to individual members and families. Again, the household church setting facilitated such individual concern.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:11–12, the apostle expresses the same individual concern for each of the Thessalonian believers, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.” Having previously used a maternal metaphor for his ministry care for the Thessalonians, Paul now turns to a paternal metaphor for directing “each” of them toward godly living.

As in the passages above, this ministry involves giving each person individual attention. Gene Green (2002:135) comments, “The main concern of v. 11 is . . . the fact that Paul and the others were concerned about the moral well-being of the individual

members of the church and not only the church as a whole. Their instruction, therefore, was individual as well as corporate.” Green’s comment corresponds to Paul’s ministry in Acts 20:20 in which he taught people publicly and from house to house. Charles Wanaker concurs (1990:106), “The words ‘each one of you’ have the rhetorical effect of individualizing what Paul is saying for each member of the community.” As Leon Morris (1984:61) notes, the grammar itself supports this stress:

Paul’s loving care comes through in his insistence that he had brought the message to *each of you*, where the Greek ‘each one’ is more emphatic (‘intensified’, BDF 305) than the simple ‘each’. In other words, he had not contented himself with giving the message in general terms to the Thessalonian public at large, but had been sufficiently interested in individuals to bring it home to them one by one, evidently in private conversations (cf. Phillips, ‘how we dealt with each one of you personally’).

Fee (2009:82) observes the same dynamic (although in light of the above passages and the above comments by other New Testament scholars, one wonders why Fee finds Paul’s concern for individuals to be so “remarkable”).

Paul begins with the important matters upfront—with the Thessalonians themselves: “you know,” he repeats for the fourth time, “how we were toward each one of you,” which (remarkably) emphasizes the individual rather than the collective nature of his care. This is followed immediately by the comparative imagery, “as a father with *his own* children,” where the emphasis in the pronoun lies with the personal dimension of the relationship.

Paul’s concern for the individual members of each church to become increasingly like Christ was something he desired his hearers and readers to understand and imitate. As we saw in chapter one, love seeks to build others up in Christian faith and maturity. Here we see that ministry involves believers helping one another individually to become more and more like Jesus Christ and to express equal care for each member.

3.3 The Holy Spirit as the Enabling Power for Mutual Ministry

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, the power for believers to minister to one another comes from the Lord. In turn, the risen Lord Jesus has given his Holy Spirit to the church. It will be helpful to follow that progression.

3.3.1 The Church as The Dwelling Place of Christ’s Spirit

We begin with an understanding of how the Holy Spirit came to indwell and fill the church.

3.3.1.1 Acts: The outpouring of Christ’s Spirit. Turning to the book of Acts, we read Luke’s opening words in Acts 1:1, referencing his previous work (seemingly the Gospel of Luke), “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. . . .” The implication is that what Luke is now going to write, i.e., the book of Acts, will be a continuation of what the risen, ascended Jesus will continue to do and to teach. Peterson (2009:102) observes,

Jesus is presented in the Gospel as being ‘powerful in word and deed before God and all the people’ (Lk. 24:19), and the narrative ends with his ascension (24:51). The opening verses of Acts suggest that Luke is about to narrate what Jesus continued *to do and to teach* after his ascension, through his Spirit and the ministry of his followers. The verb *ērxato* (‘began’) is emphatic here. . . . The idea that Jesus continues to work through his Spirit is especially suggested by Acts 2:33; 16:7. Other texts speak more generally of the risen Lord’s continuing guidance, protection, and provision for his people (e.g., 9:4–17; 16:14–15; 18:9–10; 23:11).

To Peterson’s list in his last parenthesis, we could add historic events recorded by Paul. For example, in 2 Timothy 4:16–17, Paul recalls and testifies, “At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength. . . .” In his earthly ministry, Paul was conscious of the very presence of Jesus himself (presumably in the person of his Spirit). John Polhill (1995:79–80) views Acts 1:1 in a similar way,

The unusual construction “began to” has been noted by many. It may imply that the work is unfinished. The work and words of Jesus continue throughout Acts in the ministry of the apostles and other faithful Christian witnesses. It still goes on in the work of the church today. The summary ends with a reference to the ascension, which marked the closure to the story of Jesus in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 24:50f.). In Acts the ascension marks the beginning of the story of the church.

In Acts 1:4–5, Luke records Jesus—immediately prior to his ascension—renewing his promise of the Holy Spirit, “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” He then reassured them that this Spirit would empower them to fulfil the mission he gave them, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In Acts 2:1–4, on the day of Pentecost, we read of the Spirit’s coming like the sound of violent wind, filling the one hundred and twenty believers. In verses 14–21, Peter explains to the crowd that what they just witnessed was the fulfilment of Joel 2. He then proceeds to preach about Jesus of Nazareth in verses 22–36, explaining how God has exalted him as Lord and Messiah. When the crowd responded with “what shall we do?” in verse 37, Peter promised in verse 38 the twin gifts of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit to all who will repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Following the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the connection Peter’s sermon established between receiving the Spirit and repentance and faith, the book of Acts records other fillings of the Spirit (e.g., Acts 4:31, where the Spirit’s filling empowered them to bold gospel ministry). While it goes beyond our purposes to deal with these specific incidents, Erickson’s (2013:962) summary underscores the Spirit as the source of powerful ministry in Acts, “One simply cannot account for the effectiveness of those early believers’ ministry on the basis of their abilities or efforts. They were not unusual persons. The results were a consequence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

We now return to Acts 1:1 and the work of the ascended Christ in the book of Acts. As both Peterson and Polhill asserted above, the book of Acts is a narrative of the ministry of the ascended Christ in the person of the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—in and through the people of Christ. In *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: Toward a Christ-Centered Approach*, Adrio König (1989:143–144) argues that

The Spirit is the manner in which Jesus is present in the Church, in which the Lord and the Spirit are working together, because the Spirit carries out Christ’s work. This functional identity between Christ and the Spirit (i.e., that it is Christ who works on earth through the Spirit) is confirmed by Paul, particularly in those passages where there is alternation between Christ and the Spirit.

König refers to the interim period between Christ’s ascension and his return, including the work of the Christ’s Spirit in the book of Acts. He cites various passages in Romans and in 1 and 2 Corinthians to show this functional identity. König (1989:145) concludes the discussion with this summary:

The whole range of the Spirit’s activities is what Christ does through him, whether as a continuation of that already begun during Christ’s earthly ministry or as something new. Whatever the Spirit does, he does as the Spirit of Christ. So Christ does it—in and through him. . . . The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit during the interim may be summarized thus: Christ is present in and works through the Holy Spirit in such a way that the presence and work of the Spirit is the presence and work of Christ.

Erickson (2013:962) concurs,

We conclude that the indwelling Spirit is the means of Jesus' presence with us. So Paul wrote: "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Rom 8:9–10). Paul uses interchangeably the ideas of Christ's being in us and the Spirit's dwelling in us.

The Spirit's activity in Acts and beyond is the activity of the risen, ascended Jesus Christ filling and empowering his people. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the work of the Spirit is the work of Christ.

3.3.1.2 The epistles: The church as the temple and dwelling place of Christ's Spirit. When we turn to the epistles, we find various descriptions of the church as the place where Christ dwells by his Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul addresses a conflicted church facing severe division. We hear his burden in verses 10–12,

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

How does Paul address this problem? One of his strategies is to call the Corinthian church members to see how their quarrels are harming the church and how they violate their core identity as the people of Christ. No small part of that identity is being the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple" (1 Cor 3:16–17). While later Paul will assert that the individual Christian is also the temple of the Holy Spirit (6:19), here he focuses on the church corporately as the place where Christ's Spirit dwells.

Fee (1987:147) comments on the importance of this metaphor for Paul,

The word used (*naos*) refers to the actual sanctuary, the place of the deity's dwelling, in contrast to the word *hieron*, which referred to the temple precincts as well as to the sanctuary. For Paul the imagery reflects the OT people of God. Although they are never called God's temple as such, they are his people among whom he chose to "dwell" by tabernacling in their midst. (Cf., e.g., Ps. 114:2:

“Judah became his sanctuary,” plus the rich imagery of God’s dwelling in their midst in the desert.)

The metaphor also speaks powerfully to the Corinthians who, as converted Gentiles, were well aware of the pagan shrines and temple that existed in their cities. They alone are the true temple of the one God and Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. His Spirit indwells them. So central is this truth for Paul and so contrary it is to the divisions occurring within the Corinthian church that Paul uses here (and eight other places in 1 Corinthians) the rhetorical question, “Don’t you know . . .?” as a mild rebuke (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:159–160; Thiselton 2000:316).

In 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1, the apostle tells the church, “we are the temple of the living God” (6:16), as part of his call to separate themselves from wickedness, idolatry, and uncleanness.

Paul uses temple imagery for the church again in Ephesians 2:21–22. “In [Christ Jesus] the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” As the dwelling place of God’s Spirit (v. 22), O’Brien (1999:220) describes the hope this brings to these Gentile Christians.

Paul addresses them directly (*you also*) and tells them that in their union with Christ they too, along with Jewish Christians, are being built as living stones (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5) into this heavenly temple, the place where God lives by his Spirit. . . . In contrast to what they once were—separated from the Messiah, outside the covenant community, without God and without hope (vv. 11, 12)—now they are being built into the dwelling place of God himself.

The mutual ministry that the apostle highlights in Ephesians (below and in our chapter four) is possible because the church is indeed the dwelling place of the Spirit.

Finally, although he doesn’t refer directly to the Holy Spirit, we should note the temple imagery that Peter paints in 1 Peter 2:4–5, “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Here the apostle connects his readers as living stones to *the* living Stone, a messianic reference Peter draws from Psalm 118; Isaiah 8; and Isaiah 28 in the ensuing verses. And Peter combines the imagery of the church as God’s temple and the church as God’s priesthood (a mutual ministry image we saw in chapter two of our thesis).

The passages above make it plain that the power to engage in the ministries of mutual Christian care comes from the Holy Spirit. We can conclude that one-another mutual care ministry described in Acts and envisioned in the epistles is nothing less than the ongoing work of the Lord Jesus Christ by his Spirit working in his people. The Spirit indwells believers individually and as a church and by his presence guides and empowers the actual functioning of the body. As we will see in the next two sections, the Spirit of Christ provides church members with both the interpersonal relational graces and the spiritual gifts that they need to minister to one another.

3.3.2 The Fruit of the Spirit Viewed as Relational Graces

Our purpose at this point is not to unpack each of the nine graces that make up the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22–23. Instead, we want to observe how they relate as a package to the one-another relationships within the church body and to the mutual care and ministry practices among members.

We saw in Galatians 4:19 that Paul’s goal was to see Christ formed in the Galatian Christians. In Galatians 5:1, he reminds the believers of the freedom that Christ has purchased for them—the freedom from the law of Moses, including its enslaving curse (3:10–14) and its enslaving principles (4:8–10)—and he urges them to not put themselves under that bondage. In 5:13–15 he reminds them of the freedom they have in Christ and warns them that this freedom must not lead to self-centred living.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (5:13–15)

As Paul taught earlier in the chapter, true saving faith will “express itself through love” (5:6). On the contrary, in this passage, selfish self-indulgence in the heart will produce destructive behaviour toward one another. Commenting on the sin of strife in verse 15, Bruce (1982:242) observes,

The vice against which he does warn the Galatians here is serious enough; if not checked, it could lead to the disintegration of their fellowship and the disappearance of the churches of Galatia. The language that Paul uses suggests a pack of wild animals preying on one another: ‘if you keep on biting one another and tearing one another to pieces, take care lest you be annihilated by one another’ (cf. BAG, s.v. *κατεσθίω ἀναλίσκω*).

How will his readers be able to put off destructive behaviour and replace it with humble loving service? Paul's answer is the promised Holy Spirit (3:14), the "Spirit of God's Son" (4:6).

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. (5:16–18)

Within each Christian a civil war rages. The combatants are the Spirit and the flesh (the remnants of our sinful nature). Both combatants are equally active and both vie for the believer's ongoing allegiance. The believer in turn must choose to follow the Spirit and not the flesh. In light of 5:13–15, when Christians gratify their fleshly desires, they will then destroy one another.

Paul then lays out two possible paths. The first is found in 5:19–21, the acts (or works) of the flesh.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Various commentators have suggested various ways to group the list of these fifteen fleshly acts. Our purpose is not to do that. What is evident is that most, if not all, of the qualities carry direct or at least indirect implications for the relationships between believers. In other words, these are not merely a list of evil vices; they are a list of evil vices that destroy relationships. We must read passages like 5:16–18 and 5:19–21 in the context of 5:13–15. These are personal and interpersonal sins

Paul presents the contrasting path in 5:22–23, the nine-fold fruit of Christ's Spirit. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Like the above works of the flesh, commentators have made various efforts to categorize the nine fruit. Yet none seems to be inherent in the text. Commenting on a threefold structure popularized by Lightfoot (and seen in Betz and in the punctuation of Nestle's Greek text), Longenecker (1998:260) concludes, "This threefold classification, however, while possibly of heuristic or homiletic value, is highly artificial and cannot be supported by anything in the text itself." He does suggest contextual reasons why the first (love) and the last (self-control) items might be placed in those positions—positions of emphasis in the structure of Greek lists. The term love connects us back to 5:13, "serve one another

humbly in love,” and it occupies the place of the most prominent grace in many Pauline passages. However, Longenecker’s notion that Paul might also stress self-control because it contrasts with many of the vices in 5:19–21 seems less certain.

As with the list of relational sins in verses 19–21, these nine pieces of godly fruit seem to be not merely private virtues or internal character qualities but relational graces. “In Paul’s ethical appeal this list of qualities paints a picture of relationships that are built and nourished by the presence of the Spirit” (Hansen 1994:*en.loc.*). While some graces (e.g., joy) might suggest little interpersonal application, most include an aspect of relational expression toward others. Consider two examples. First, the term “peace” (*eirēnē*) means something more than merely inner peace or internal tranquillity. It includes a relational aspect. Bruce (1982:252–253; also Longenecker 1998:261; Hansen 1994:*en.loc.*) comments on this passage,

In the OT wisdom literature the sowing of discord among brothers is hateful and abominable to God (Prov. 6:19). Peace is therefore one of the marks of the children of God—not only peace with God but peace with one another: in the home (1 Cor. 7:15), in the church (1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 4:3), in the world (Rom. 12:18), between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14–18). ‘Let us then pursue what makes for peace (τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης) and for mutual upbuilding’ (Rom. 14:19); this is the way to receive the blessing pronounced by Jesus on ‘the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God’ (Mt. 5:9).

In a church rife with theological controversy (1:6–7; 5:12; 6:12) like the Galatian church, and apparently with members in danger of biting and devouring each other (5:15), the members sorely need the Spirit’s fruit of peace.

As a second example, the word that the NIV translates as “forbearance” is *makrothymia*. While most English versions opt for the English word “patience,” there are two Greek words often translated as patience in the New Testament. One is *hypomonē*, usually referring to patient endurance amid trial. The other is *makrothymia*, used here, usually referring to relational patience, the gracious ability to remain calm when provoked, to not retaliate in the face of offenses, and to put up with the sins and failures of others. Fung (1988:267) explains, “Insofar as a distinction can be drawn between the two terms, *hypomonē* denotes the ability to persist in pressing forward in spite of difficult circumstances, whereas *makrothymia* refers to a longsuffering attitude towards other people, deferring one’s anger under provocation, and refusing to retaliate for wrong done to oneself.” Walter Hansen (1994:*en.loc.*) agrees, “It is the opposite of ‘fits of rage’ or short temper. It is the quality of staying with people even when

constantly wronged and irritated by them.” In this sense, *makrothymia* is the complete opposite of the strife and anger seen in 5:15 and 5:20.

It is also helpful to view the nine graces as a group that comes as one package, like a single cluster of fruit. Fung (*ibid*: 262–263) makes an insightful distinction between the impartation of the Spirit’s fruit and the Spirit’s ministry gifts.

Elsewhere Paul speaks of the Spirit distributing a diversity of gifts separately to each individual as he wills (1 Cor 12:11), but here the singular “harvest” shows that the nine graces mentioned are not, so to say, different jewels; rather, they are different facets of the same jewel which cohere and show forth their lustre simultaneously—when the Spirit is truly at work in the believer’s life.

While each believer receives one or more different gifts, each believer receives the entire nine-fold fruit of the Spirit (although we can allow for different degrees of maturity between one believer and another).

Given what we saw above concerning the Holy Spirit being the Spirit of Christ, then reflecting on the nine graces also gives a fuller portrait of Jesus and of what growing Christlikeness in a believer would look like.

At the same time, Paul lists additional relational graces in various other epistles. The summary list below incorporates Galatians 5:22–23 with Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12–15; and 2 Timothy 2:22, with the terms listed in their English noun forms. (To this list we could also add Jesus’s Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3–12; Peter’s list in 1 Peter 3:8–12 and 2 Peter 1:5–7; and James’s list in James 3:17–18.)

Galatians 5:22–23	Ephesians 4:2	Colossians 3:12–15	2 Timothy 2:22
Love	Humility	Compassion	Righteousness
Joy	Gentleness	Kindness	Faith
Peace	Patience	Humility	Love
Forbearance	Bearing with	Gentleness	Peace
Kindness		Patience	Purity
Goodness		Bearing with	
Faithfulness		Forgiveness	
Gentleness		Love	
Self-Control		Peace	
		Gratitude	

The similarity between the fruit of the Spirit and these other three lists suggests that they too reflect the work of Christ’s Spirit in the members of his church. In fact, within the broader context of the letters, one can argue that the qualities in Ephesians 4:2 above are indeed also the fruit of Spirit, based on Paul’s prayer in 3:16–17, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (cf. 2:22). And we can

suggest that the 2 Timothy 2:22 qualities above likewise bear at least some relationship to “the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (1:14).

To these lists we could also add the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13 as another expression of the fruit of God’s Spirit working in the church. When we look at 1 Corinthians 12–14 below in our discussion of the Spirit’s ministry gifts, we will see how these attributes of love are indispensable for healthy mutual ministry relationships and for the proper exercise of those gifts within the body.

We conclude this section with the assertion that it is the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christ—who enables the members of the church to show the specific needed relational graces to demonstrate mutual Christian care to one another.

3.3.3 The Gifts of the Spirit that Guide Mutual Ministry

The Spirit of the ascended Christ not only gives his people relational graces but also ministry abilities—the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through their spiritual gifts, the same Jesus who has worked for their salvation also works in them and for them to carry out the salvation he began. In both of these ways—his relational graces and his ministry gifts—Jesus himself by his Spirit actively nurtures and shepherds his people by equipping and encouraging them to serve and care for each other.

3.3.3.1 An Overview of Four New Testament Passages. We will examine four New Testament passages that explicitly address spiritual gifts: Romans 12:1–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–14:40; Ephesians 4:7–16; and 1 Peter 4:7–11. In each of these, we will see how the Spirit graciously distributes ministry gifts to his churches and empowers his people to minister to each other.³⁹ In each passage, we will discover at least one common denominator in these gifts, namely, their broad ministry purpose of mutual care, maturation, and edification. The apostles present the active, orderly, and loving exercise of Spirit-given ministry gifts as a vital part of a healthy church community.

1. Romans 12. Paul’s letter to the Romans presents his most thorough, theologically packed expression of God’s work in Jesus Christ to save all who believe.

³⁹ I am not including here the “gift” (*charisma*) of singleness or marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:7 (“I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.”) or the seeming gift of singleness Jesus mentions in Matthew 19:11 (“those to whom it has been given,” *hois dedotai*) since these point to God’s providential dealings with his people not the Spirit-given ministry abilities toward one another that is the focus of our thesis.

From his opening words in 1:1–4, the apostle declares “the gospel of God” as he plumbs the depths of human depravity, details the work of Jesus and the efficacy of the cross and resurrection, and pictures salvation by grace through faith as seen in Abraham, David, and every generation.

Yet we err to regard Romans as merely a soteriological masterpiece. “It is not a systematic theology but a letter, written in specific circumstances and with specific purposes” (Moo 1996:1). Paul displays intense pastoral concern as he addresses how this gospel of God brings unity between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians in forming God’s church, the one new body of Jesus Christ. The tension is hinted at in the early chapters (1:14–17; 2:9; 2:17ff; 3:9, 23; etc.) and addressed foundationally in chapters 9–11 where the relationship of present and future Israel and the converted Gentiles is discussed.

Chapter 11 ends with soaring rhetoric—a resounding crescendo of praise to the all-wise Redeemer God for his saving mercies toward Israel and the nations. How should the Roman church readers respond to this God? Chapter 12 answers: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.... Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (vv. 1–2). The cross demands consecration toward God.

How should these Christians relate to each other in light of redeeming grace? Paul begins with a foundational perspective on how they should view themselves. “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (v. 3). Here and in other places (Phil 2:1–5; 1 Cor 1–4; Gal 5–6) Paul’s controlling concern is the danger of an inflated self-esteem. Realistic, accurate self-diagnosis in light of God’s mercies is the antidote to pride, and humble self-assessment is critical to the functioning of the church body.

What is the “measure of faith” in verse 3 that God has given believers? Colin Kruse (2012:468–469) summarizes the two basic interpretations. The first approach believes that Paul refers to the one Christian faith God has given to all believers, Jew or Gentile. Believers are to think of themselves with sound judgment in light of Christ and his gospel, the standard by which they estimate themselves. For example, Moo (1996:761) writes, “Our faith *is* the measure. On this view, God has not given a different measure to each Christian but has given to each Christian the same measure. . .

It is that faith which believers have in common as fellow members of the body of Christ that Paul here highlights as the standard against which each of us is to estimate himself.”

But a second approach seems more compelling. The measure of faith refers to differing ministry gifts and the individual’s personal faith as they exercise those gifts. This view best captures the meaning of “measure” as apportionment in Paul’s writings, e.g., where God calls people to himself in various places he assigns (1 Cor 7:17), God assigns different ministry fields for his apostles (2 Cor 10:13), and God assigns differing grace gifts (Eph 4:7 with 4:8–13) to his people (Dunn 1998:721–722; Schreiner 1998:652–653; Kruse 2012:468). Paul observes that believers have varying measures of faith and maturity in their understanding of themselves and their exercise of differing functions within the church. Citing other writers, Schreiner (1998:653) notes, “I conclude, then, that Paul is speaking of the quantity of faith or trust that each believer possesses . . . Paul acknowledges elsewhere that believers have different levels of faith (Rom. 14:1), and thus one cannot dismiss this idea as anti-Pauline.” Most importantly, this interpretation best fits the ensuing context (vv. 4–8) of the varying gifts that believers receive. Kruse (2012:468) concludes, “The view that it should be interpreted in connection with the various gifts of ministry of different believers has the advantage of relevance to the immediate context, and is therefore probably preferable.”

What will humble self-assessment produce? A body in which all its parts function properly, purposely, and harmoniously, according to the grace God has given:

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Paul uses a simple metaphor. Just as one human body has many parts that function differently, so the many members of the church form one body yet function differently. Here that functioning involves the exercise of their various grace gifts.

Paul lists seven gifts in verses 6b–8, adding comments to some of them concerning the proper attitude or manner of their use:

1. Prophesying, to be done in proportion to his faith (v. 6b);
2. Serving (v. 7a);
3. Teaching (v. 7b);

4. Encouraging (v. 8a);
5. Contributing to the needs of others or giving, to be done generously (v. 8b);
6. Leadership or governing, to be done diligently (v. 8c);
7. Showing mercy, to be done cheerfully (v. 8d).

Paul envisions believers using each of their gifts “according to the grace given us.” While this clause could refer to the person’s subjective appropriation of God’s grace in his life, the context more likely describes the source of the gifts themselves (Kruse 2012:470; Morris 1988:440; Schreiner 1998:654). These seven gifts are “grace” gifts, ministry abilities graciously bestowed by God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit (the giver is not specified here but the passive form implies a divine source) to each member of his church.

In the ensuing verses, verse 9–21, Paul issues a series of short commands on how this same body should conduct itself toward each other and toward its enemies. As we will see below, there is a close connection between the spiritual gifts in verses 6b–8 and verses 9–21.

2. 1 Corinthians 12–14. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian Christians consists of a series of responses to the many theological and ethical problems in the life of this conflicted, immature church. Paul raises some of the issues; in other cases he responds to issues they raise. While structurally distinct and lacking smooth transitions, the sections do reflect a deeper thematic unity. The apostle consistently shows how God’s redemptive work in Christ solves the problems that either he or the Corinthians raise.⁴⁰

In 12:1 Paul tackles the problem of spiritual gifts: “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.” While the English adjective “spiritual” might suggest for an average reader something like “religious” (as in, “how is your ‘spiritual’ life going?”) or “internal” or “non-material” (in some kind of pagan Greek sense), the Greek term *pneumatikōn* and the context reveal that Paul is addressing ministry abilities that are birthed and empowered by God’s Spirit. Perhaps the best way to capture this emphasis would be to call them “Spiritual gifts” (or Spirit-given or Spirit-ual), letting the upper case “S” denote their Spirit-given nature, not their religious, internal, or non-material nature (as the adjective “spiritual” might

⁴⁰ See, for example, D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), which addresses 1 Corinthians 1–4; and 9. And while Brian S. Rosner (*Paul, Scripture, & Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* [Baker, 1994]), 135–136, 188, argues that the content of Paul’s ethics in 1 Corinthians 5–7 arises largely from the Hebrew Scriptures, he acknowledges gospel motivations within Paul.

misleadingly suggest in other settings). If anything, the Spirit's work of gifting his people with ministry skills shows itself in decidedly external, visible, and material ways.

Before explicitly listing these gifts, the apostle lays a foundational perspective. In their pagan days, their gods were nothing more than mute idols. Yet now, having joined the Corinthian believers to Jesus Christ, the Spirit enables them to confess aloud, "Jesus is Lord." There are Christ-exalting utterances that the Spirit enables and Christ-denying utterances that do not proceed from him (vv. 2–3). The Spirit works to convert people from cursers to confessors.

Yet conversion is simply the beginning. God's Spirit does more. In verses 4–6, the Spirit empowers the church members to minister to each other with their specific, individual "gifts," "service," and "workings"—three synonymous descriptors of their ministry abilities: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men."

Moreover, each of these gifts come from the same triune God—the same Spirit, the same Lord (Jesus), and the same God. For this divided church, the message of a single, united, divine, Trinitarian source resounds loudly. Any legitimate diversity within the church must issue only from their gospel unity, a theme that arises from the start of the letter (1:10ff) and throughout. No other diversity is condoned; all party divisions are condemned.

To whom does the Holy Spirit bestow his gifts, and for what purpose? Paul's powerful answer in verse 7 exposes a major problem in the Corinthian church: "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Two fundamental lessons emerge. First, the Spirit's gifts are not merely for some members, but for all members ("each one"). Second, the Spirit's gifts are not for an individual's advancement, profit, or prestige, but explicitly "for the common good," the care and maturation of the entire church. David Garland (2003:577) affirms this twofold emphasis ("to each one," "for the common good") and notes the twofold structure in verses 8–11 (although he only cites 8–10) and in verses 12–26:

Paul now gives the basic thesis for this chapter: "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for mutual benefit." The gifts are given to individuals so that they may benefit others and serve the whole body. In 12:8–10, he develops the statement "to each one is given" by the Spirit. In 12:12–26, he develops the meaning of the phrase "for mutual benefit."

In verses 8–10 Paul lists nine such gifts given to individual believers (“to one . . . , to another . . .”) by the one Holy Spirit:

1. The message of wisdom (v. 8a);
2. The message of knowledge (v. 8b);
3. Faith (v. 9a);
4. Gifts of healing (v. 9b);
5. Miraculous powers (v. 10a);
6. Prophecy (v. 10b);
7. Distinguishing between spirits (v. 10c);
8. Speaking in different kinds of tongues (v. 10d);
9. The interpretation of tongues (v. 10e).

Having reminded the readers of the mutual ministry purpose of the gifts in verse 7 and having listed nine examples in verses 8–10, Paul draws another summary statement in verse 11: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” The points are clear: (1) All spiritual gifts are Spirit-ual, given by the one and only Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ the head of the church. (2) The Spirit gives gifts to each believer; he bypasses or excludes no one. (3) The Spirit does so as he sees fit; there is a definite sovereignty in the Spirit’s dispersion of gifts. We will return to these themes in our summary below.

As in Romans 12 above, Paul introduces the body metaphor in verse 12, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” He essentially repeats the point of the non-metaphorical verses 4–6, i.e., that the many members have different gifts that are all from the same Lord. In verse 13, Paul elaborates on the oneness of the body, repeating the word “one” three times. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” In verses 14–26, he draws a major implication from this extended one-body-with-many-parts metaphor, namely, that no part of the body is less important or less useful than another part. All parts—even the weaker, less honourable, and less presentable members—remain indispensable and must be cared for by one another within the body.

And this, notes Paul, is by God’s design. Note the active verbs (emphasis added):

- “But in fact God has *arranged* the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he *wanted* them to be.” (v. 18)
- “But God has *combined* the members of the body and has *given* greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” (vv. 24b–25)

It is important to see that Paul's opposition to church division arises not only from his Christology ("Is Christ divided?", 1:13) but also from his ecclesiology—from the nature of the many members with their differing ministries all being part of the *one* body, being gifted by the one God, one Lord, and one Spirit.

In verses 25–26 Paul reminds the members that the operation of the gifts by each member is a way that they show "concern" (v. 25, *merimnōsin*) for each other. Paul then proceeds in verses 27–30 to apply more plainly his one-body-with-many-parts metaphor to the church's actual ministries. "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed. . ." (vv. 27–28a). Paul's points seem clear: there are many gifts and every member has one. By God's design, the one body of Christ has diverse ministries within it, none of which should be despised. Paul then lists eight specific ministries in verse 28.

1. Apostles;
2. Prophets;
3. Teachers;
4. Workers of miracles;
5. Those having gifts of healing;
6. Those able to help others;
7. Those with gifts of administration;
8. Those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

Unlike the lists in 12:8–10 or Romans 12 above, this list (like Eph 4:11) consists of gifted persons themselves (person-gifts) not abilities (ability-gifts). "In the church God has appointed" these gifted ministers. While only two of the eight are explicitly called "gifts," the contrast with verse 31 (below) suggests that Paul viewed them all as spiritual gifts. There is little if any distinction in 1 Corinthians 12 between Spirit-ual gifts and Spirit-empowered ministries.

To drive home his previous point, in verses 29–30 Paul gives a list of seven gifted persons in the form of rhetorical questions. This list includes six of the above eight items in verse 28:

1. Apostles (v.29a);
2. Prophets (v.29b);
3. Teachers (v.29c);
4. Miracle workers (v.29d);
5. Those with gifts of healing (v.30a);
6. Those who speak in tongues (v.30b);
7. Those who interpret (v.30c; presumably interpreting the spoken tongues).

Two observations seem vital. First, Paul's use of rhetorical questions ("Are all. . . ?")

“Do all. . . ?”) that expect “No” answers begins to turn the corner toward confronting the Corinthians’ abuse of their spiritual gifts. The questions signal a shift in tone from less-pointed instruction (vv. 1–28) to more-directive exhortation and rebuke (v. 31; and on into 1 Cor 13–14).

Second, while Paul repeats verbatim the first five gifts he listed in verse 28, he departs in two ways in the rest of the list. He skips the next two gifts listed in verse 28 (helping others, gifts of administration) and immediately jumps to tongues speaking. And in verse 30c he adds the interpretation of tongues, a gift not found in verse 28. Like his use of rhetorical questions, these departures narrow his focus to the tongues-versus-prophecy problem he will address in the next two chapters.

In those next chapters, starting with 12:31—the English Bible chapter division here seems unfortunate—Paul launches what seems to be a desperately needed corrective for the factional, divided Corinthian church. While Paul does not explicitly say this, a legitimate mirror-reading inference, given the amount of space he devotes to this, suggests that the display of gifts by the Corinthian church members frequently lacked love.

At least two problems in the church appear evident, necessitating this elaboration on the centrality of love. First, the church was exercising their gifts in selfish, unloving ways. So Paul calls them in 1 Corinthians 13 to make love—“the most excellent way” (12:31b)—their highest value. He demonstrates the indispensable nature of love in any expression of gifts over their current expressions of gifts without love. He specifies examples of loveless prophecy, tongues, faith, and knowledge from verses 8–10 above, and even love-less giving (13:3; not mentioned in 1 Cor 12 but mentioned in Rom 12:8). Exercising gifts without love brings no profit to the minister (13:2, “I am nothing”; 13:3, “I gain nothing”—more warnings against pride within the church, as in Rom 12:3 and Phil 2:3–4) or, as we shall see in 1 Corinthians 14, to the recipient of their ministry. Carson (1987:61) concisely summarizes Paul’s concern,

In none of these instances does Paul depreciate spiritual gifts, but he refuses to recognize *any* positive assessment of *any* of them unless the gift is discharged in love. Principally, therefore, any particular gift is dispensable, so far as spiritual profit or attestation of the Spirit’s presence is concerned; but love is indispensable.

To a church that stresses certain gifts to the neglect of love, Paul’s rebuke is stern.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a we see an overlap of the qualities of love with the Holy Spirit’s fruit—the relational graces—we saw previously in Galatians 5:22–23 and

several other passages (Eph 4:2; Col 3:12–15; 2 Tim 2:22) above. The table below compares the opening verse in each passage:

Galatians 5:22, The fruit of the Spirit	1 Corinthians 13:4, Love is . . .
Love (ἀγάπη) →	Love (ἀγάπη) is . . .
Joy	
Peace	
Forbearance (μακροθυμία) →	patient (μακροθυμεῖ)
Kindness (χρηστότης) →	kind (χρηστεύεται)

The linguistic similarities are worth noting: as the arrows in the table above show, both 1 Corinthians 13:4 and Galatians 5:22 list love, patience (or forbearance NIV, same Greek term), and kindness as vital components in healthy church member relationships. In addition, even where different words are used (e.g., “self-control” in Gal 5:23 and “not self-seeking” in 1 Cor 13:5), the conceptual overlap between the Spirit’s fruit and the indispensable marks of love for dispensing the Spirit’s gifts seems compelling. While the Corinthians’ exercise of their gifts lacked the qualities of love in 13:4–8, we could also say that it lacked the fruit of the Spirit as seen in Galatians 5:21–22; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12–15; and 2 Timothy 2:22. Ironically, whether it is a church (Corinth) that is misusing the Spirit’s gifts and arrogantly treating less honourable members with divisive, dismissive attitudes (1 Cor 12:12–26) or a church (Galatia) that is confused about the law of Moses and in danger of “biting and devouring each other” (Gal 5:15) and not living by the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 26), the injury to the church body is similar. Moreover, a major part of the answer is the same: the humble demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of the church members. Paul has a similar concern for both the Galatian Christians in Galatians 5 and the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 12–14, and that concern relates to how the members in each church are understanding, appropriating, and living by the Spirit, and how the members in each church are viewing, treating, and loving their fellow members.

The apostle concludes 1 Corinthians 13 in verses 8b–13 by asserting the crucial place of love. The indispensable role of love in ministry here repeats the same emphasis that we saw above in John 13:17 and Ephesians 5:1–2. Paul connects them again in 1 Thessalonians 1:3, “We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” That the Corinthian church needed this emphasis on love can be seen in other places earlier in the epistle: their lawsuits against one another (6:1–7), their

insensitivity to those with weaker consciences (8:1–13; 10:23–11:1), and their neglect of the less fortunate members in eating and drinking as part of the Lord’s Supper meal (11:17–34).

The second problem in Corinth that required this concentration on love, addressed in 12:31a and resumed in 14:1ff, concerned the relative priority the Corinthians assigned to some gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues) over others. In 12:31a Paul calls the believers to “eagerly desire the greater gifts.” Commentators have understood these words in at least three major ways. First, some have translated it as an indicative statement (the Greek text does allow for this): “You eagerly desire the greater gifts.” The sense would be that of an indictment by Paul that the Corinthians have been exalting and pursuing what they have wrongly regarded as the greatest gifts. However, since the precise verb form appears in both 14:1 and 14:39 as an imperative, in a similar context addressing similar themes, it is unlikely that Paul intends it here as an indicative. As Ciampa and Rosner (2010:615) observe, “virtually all interpreters and English translations understand it to be an imperative” (see also Thistleton 2000:1025 and Garland 2003:601 for lists of commentators).

Most interpreters take the verb as an imperative: “Eagerly desire the greater grace-gifts.” But there are variations of how to interpret its meaning. Garland (2003:601) cites Baker (1974:227; cf. Chevallier 1966:158–63) who claims that Paul cites a Corinthian watchword. Baker bases his argument on the fact that Paul qualifies the verb each time it occurs. A second position views it as an imperative used in an ironic or permissive sense: “Go ahead and pursue what you wrongly think are the so-called greater gifts and see what that does to the church” (J. F. M. Smit, cited in Ciampa & Rosner 2010:615). But it is unlikely that Paul would “introduce a discussion of love with mockery” (Garland 2003:601), and there seems to be no reason that we have to understand it this way.

The third view also interprets the text as an imperative but in a straightforward sense as positive command to pursue the greater gifts, which he will identify in chapter 14 as prophecy (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:615, Thiselton 2000:1024–1026, Garland 2003:601, Fee 1987:624–625). After the chapter 13 interlude about love being the most vital attribute for the exercise of all the gifts, he encourages the readers in 14:1, “Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.”

Paul proceeds in 1 Corinthians 14:2–12 to detail the advantages of the gift of prophecy over the gift of tongues, which the Corinthians have been wrongly exalting.

While defining these two gifts goes beyond the scope of our thesis,⁴¹ Paul's arguments about the advantages of prophecy underscore his broader concerns about spiritual gifts, especially their role of ministering to and caring for members of the body. For example, unlike tongues (without interpretation), prophecy ministers to others in the church "for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort" (v. 3) and for the edification of the church (vv. 4, 5; cf. "for the common good," 12:7). As we saw in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 above, the Spirit provides his gifts to enable his people to care for and serve each other.

In verses 13–25 Paul instructs the Corinthians on how to exercise tongues in their church gatherings. Again, the priorities of edification and instruction of believers soar in prominence (vv. 17, 19, 22). In verse 26 Paul inserts a summary statement that reveals his driving concern for edification. Whatever the specific worship activity, "all of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (v. 26). He then issues more procedural directives on the exercise of tongues and of prophecy in verses 27–40. In these he does not fail to convey the same goal he stated repeatedly, viz., "so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged" (v. 31), along with the goals of peace (v. 33) and of order (v. 40).

While again we see the predominant emphasis on edification, the theme of care is not absent. The exercise of spiritual gifts by believers in their ministry to one another should not only instruct and edify but also "encourage" one another (v. 31; cf. v. 3). Moreover, we can also add that all true instruction and edification will produce mature members who care for one another, since spiritual maturity—as seen in the relational graces above—in Paul's writings always includes components of love, care, and compassion toward one another.

3. Ephesians 4. As we saw above, in Ephesians 4:11, the ascended Christ gives to his church gifts so that the church might grow in unity and maturity. What are these gifts? While Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 primarily speak of impersonal abilities (ability-gifts), Ephesians 4:11 speaks of individuals (person-gifts): "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...." While we assume that these individuals have ability-gifts (seen in Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12), Paul says something more pointed. The specific types of

⁴¹ The definitions are disputed among Bible scholars. See, for example, the four different positions in Wayne A. Grudem, ed. *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).

individuals are *themselves* Christ's gifts to his church (O'Brien 1999:297; Bruce 1984:345). They do not merely *have* gifts; they *are* gifts. As Robert Kolb (2000:250) explains,

The lists of spiritual gifts that are often cited from Paul's letters do not only focus on the talents of individual believers that the Holy Spirit uses to serve others. The list in Rom. 12:6–8 is indeed such a list. But the lists in Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28–30 enumerate the people who have these abilities and are using them as gifts under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit. Not only can my abilities become spiritual gifts; I, as a fellow believer, am the Spirit's gift to the whole body as I share God's Word with others or point to the love and presence of Christ with deeds of love that help and heal.

What is the relationship between "pastors and teachers" (*tous de poimēnas kai didaskalous*) in Ephesians 4:11? Unlike the three previous groups in Paul's list, they are governed by a single definite article and linked by a connecting *kai*. This has rightly led virtually all Ephesian scholars to suggest that some relationship exists between the two groups.⁴²

We find two main views among the commentators. Some writers suggest that the two nouns represent one entity, i.e., pastor-teachers whose dual task is to shepherd and teach the congregation. Markus Barth (1960:438–439) calls them "teaching shepherds." Hendriksen (1967:197) concurs, "What we have here, accordingly, is a designation of *ministers of local congregations*, 'teaching elders (or overseers).' By means of expounding the Word these men *shepherd* their flocks." Based on Paul's three offices in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (apostles, prophets, teachers), Bruce (1984:346,348) argues that the office of teacher in that verse is given a twofold designation (pastors and teachers) here in Ephesians 4:11 and that "teaching is an essential part of the pastoral ministry."

Yet there are several reasons to assume that the terms are distinct and not identical, and instead to view these gifted people as associated in some way, probably serving with overlapping functions (Lincoln 1990:250; O'Brien 1999:300; Arnold 2010:260; Klein 2006:115–116; Liefeld 1997:*en.loc.*). The mere presence of the grammatical construction of two plural nouns joined by a *kai* and governed by a single definite article need not imply identity. The same construction appears in 2:20

⁴² John Muddiman (2001:199) notes the grammatical change in Paul's list here, but suggests that "it may have been dropped as unnecessarily tedious repetition." While Thielman (2010:275) allows for this possibility, Arnold (2010:260) calls it "doubtful" and most commentators see the change as significant in some way and hold to one of the two positions summarized below.

(“apostles and prophets,” τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν”) for two different ministries, albeit with similar functions in the foundation of the church.⁴³ Moreover, several passages in Paul and in other writers identify teachers as a specific group in the church (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor. 12:28–29; Gal. 6:6; Jas. 3:1). Clinton Arnold’s (2010:260) conclusion seems wise, “Nevertheless, because the two nouns are united under the one article, they are not to be regarded as entirely distinct groups. Paul probably expressed himself in this way because he wanted to convey that pastors are to be gifted to teach (thus, the latter is a subset of the former), but he stops short of saying that all teachers are gifted to be pastors” (cf. Lincoln 1990:250; O’Brien 1999:300; Klein 2006:116).

What do these four or five “gift-people” do? Verse 12 tells us that their task is “to prepare God’s people for works of service. . . .”⁴⁴ Their ministry is to equip the members to minister. The gift-people train the body members to serve and care for themselves so that the church will grow in unity and maturity (vv. 13–16). The ascended, victorious Christ has given his church gifted pastors and teachers to equip the members to speak the gospel (and its implications and applications) to each other, and that as each member engages in that activity the church will grow in maturity and unity.

4. 1 Peter 4. We should consider one more passage, 1 Peter 4, where the New Testament emphasizes spiritual gifts. Having summarized the facts and meaning of Christ’s redemptive suffering in the previous chapters, the apostle Peter calls these suffering believers in verses 1–6 to fight against sin, to please God, to resist the solicitations to sin from their ungodly neighbours, and to draw comfort from God’s promise to judge their enemies.

In verse 7 Peter brings forth summary perspectives that should govern the church’s thinking in these end times. While there remains the final step of Jesus’s actual return, Peter understands that the “near”-ness of the end requires an immediate re-focus (see 1:6; 4:17; 5:6, 10).

⁴³ Citing grammarian Daniel B. Wallace, Arnold (2010:260) notes that the Granville-Sharp rule does not necessarily apply to plural nouns.

⁴⁴ It is uncertain whether all five groups in verse 11 are the subject of verse 12’s action of equipping. Yet, out of eight commentaries consulted (Thielman 2010:277; O’Brien 1999:301–302; Bruce 1984:349; Lincoln 1990:253; Klein 2006:116; Liefeld 1997:*en. loc.*; Arnold 2010:262; Muddiman 2001:199–200), none restricted the subject. Each writer assumed that all five groups would do the equipping task. While one might conjecture that the “pastors and teachers” might be most likely to do the work of verse 12, we should remember there were apostles (like James in Jerusalem) and prophets (like those in Corinth) whose ministries were closely connected to specific citywide churches and not just to itinerant ministries.

The end of all things is near. Therefore, be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (4:7–11)

What should be the church members' end time priorities? Peter lists them in verses 7b–11a (concluding his list with a benediction in v. 11b):

- Be sober-minded and self-controlled in prayer, v. 7b.
- Love—above all—which involves forgiving each other, v. 8.
- Offer hospitality to one another, v. 9.
- Use your God-given grace gifts to serve others, vv. 10–11a.

What does Peter tell us about spiritual gifts in verses 10–11? First, based on the “Above all” context in verse 8, they must express God's priority of love. Like Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12–14, Peter zealously desires that everything the members do reflect the preeminent call to love one another. Second, they are given for the purpose of ministry—“to serve one another” (v. 10). Third, they come from God—Peter mentions God four times in verses 10–11—and display God's grace “in its various forms.” The differing gifts reflect various aspects of God's gracious ministry toward his people (teaching, giving, mercy, serving, etc.). J. Ramsey Michaels (1998:249) explains how the exercise of spiritual gifts brings God's ongoing, incremental grace to the members of the church while they await the final outpour of grace when Jesus returns:

Having already used *χάρις*, “grace,” for the salvation awaiting those who believe in Christ (1:10, 13; 3:7; 2:19, 20 are different), Peter now points to that eschatological “grace” at work even now in the worship and ministries of the Christian congregations to which he writes. In that sense it is *ποικίλης*, “diversified”; although it will come all at once, in power, at the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13), it also comes in small increments through the varied ministries of those who speak and those who serve in every congregation.

God calls believers to use whatever gifts they have received to serve others. As they do so faithfully they administer those specific measures of God's grace that their fellow members most need.

In verse 11 Peter then specifies two gifts, the gift of speaking and the gift of serving. While some writers might include hospitality (v. 9) as a gift, there seems no exegetical basis to connect verse 9 with the explicit “gift” references and with the

“if...then” structure in verses 10–11. Just as all believers should “love” in verse 8, all believers should show hospitality. Peter uses the verb *διακονεω* twice in verses 10–11. The first use in verse 10 (*diakonountes*) is general, referring to God’s ministry purpose in giving gifts. The second use in verse 11 (*diakonei*) points to a more specific gift, the gift of serving others, although like Paul’s passages above Peter does not define what that specific service entails.

Church members faithfully administer God’s grace in exercising the gift of speaking by being sure to speak “the very words of God.” They faithfully administer God’s grace in their gift of serving when they serve with dependence on “the strength God provides.” To solidify this God-centred emphasis, Peter ends this paragraph by reminding his readers that they should exercise their gifts for a purpose: “so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.” Both the health and maturity of the church and the majesty and praise of God seem to constrain the apostle.

3.3.3.2 Summary Perspectives on the Spirit’s Gifts. We can summarize the teaching of these four passages by asking and answering thirteen questions:

1. What is a spiritual gift? Based on the above four passages, we can define a spiritual gift as a Spirit-given ministry ability given to believers in Christ to enable them to minister God’s gracious help to one another so that the body of Christ would grow in health, unity, and spiritual maturity. Every believer receives one; the Spirit bypasses or excludes no member. They come from the Holy Spirit, as Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 emphasize. As 1 Corinthians 12:1 puts it so succinctly, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” All spiritual gifts are Spirit-ual, given by the one and only Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ the head of the church.

Moreover, the Spirit bestows gifts as he sees fit; there is a definite sovereignty in the Spirit’s dispersion of gifts. Citing verse 11, Erickson (2013:963; also Allison 2012:118) summarizes this truth,

The Spirit is in one sense also the sovereign of the church. For it is he who equips the body by dispensing gifts, which in some cases are persons to fill various offices and in other cases are special abilities. He decides when a gift will be bestowed, and upon whom it is to be conferred.

As we will see, the sovereignty of God’s Spirit is a vital factor in answering many of the questions below.

2. What is the purpose of the Spirit's gifts? The answer from our passages is univocal: Jesus's Holy Spirit gives gifts to enable believers to minister to one another in the body. The ministry function of the gifts in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 is plain. With the exception of uninterpreted tongues (14:2–4), each is given “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). By the means of these gifts, members show “concern” (1 Cor 12:25, *merimnōsin*) for each other. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:607) unpack the thrust of this term as “giving care and attention to each other’s needs (which will entail mainly the care and attention of the well-to-do to the needs of the have-nots). Like much of Paul’s practical teaching in this letter, this reflects the motif of ‘love’ which ‘builds up’ (8:1) and anticipates the extended treatment on the theme of love in the following chapter.” Garland (2003:597) connects this care to the Corinthians’ neglect of some members at the Lord’s Supper in chapter 11,

Evidence of callous indifference to the plight of the “have-nots” at the Lord’s Supper (11:17–34) reveals a bodily breakdown. Their behaviour at their Lord’s Supper disclosed their prejudice: these members could go missing with no great loss to the church. . . . As one attends to physical ailments in the body, so Paul expects the church to attend to those members who are suffering. The principle of love embodied in the cross mandates that one should always seek honour for others, which stands in absolute antithesis to the dominant value that seeks honour only for oneself in a preening self-indulgence.

In 1 Corinthians 14:3, for example, unlike tongues (apart from interpretation), prophecy ministers to others for the “strengthening, encouraging and comfort” and for the edification of the church (vv. 4, 5; cf. “for the common good,” 12:7). While the language of strengthening and edifying predominates in chapter 14, we must not bypass the purposes in verse 3 of “encouragement” (*paraklēsin*) and “comfort” (*parathyman*). Commenting on these three purposes for spiritual gifts in verse 3, Ciampa and Rosner (2010:672) observe,

These three words strongly suggest that prophetic ministry, by its very nature, must flow out of a deep concern for the well-being of those who need to be strengthened, encouraged, and comforted. As Paul describes it, it is certainly not a ministry marked by a cold communication of theological or other truths, but one marked by commitment to and compassion for other members of the body.

The latter term carries the sense of “that which serves as encouragement to one who is depressed or in grief; *encouragement, comfort, consolation*” (Arndt *et al* 2000:769). While this term appears here in the New Testament, a cognate form appears in John 11:19, 31 in the context of comforting the bereaved in their distress (Morris 1985:184). Based on what we know of Paul in the above passages, we might reasonably suggest

that Paul would desire that these same purposes of “strengthening, encouragement and comfort” should mark *all* ministrations of the Spirit’s gifts by church members, not merely the exercise of the gift of prophecy. As we saw in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 above, the Spirit provides his gifts to enable his people to care for and serve each other.

Moreover, in our two other passages, God’s gifts are given “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph 4:12) and members might “speak the truth in love to one another” (Eph 4:15). In 1 Peter 4:10 these gifts enable each believer to “serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10). Finally, in their larger context, each passage explicitly opposes any use of the gifts for self-exaltation.

3. What gifts should be included in a list of the Spirit’s gifts? In terms of the specific gifts listed in the four passages we examined, see the Appendix for a list of twenty-six gifts. However, as the prefatory note in the Appendix states, one could merge some of them. Moreover, the twenty-six items include several that are both impersonal ability-gifts and personal people-gifts. For example, we should not assume that only those formally designated as prophets or teachers in 1 Corinthians 12:28 or Ephesians 4:11 might exercise gifts of prophecy or teaching. In contrast, we might note that the office (or position or role, depending on one’s exegesis and view of polity questions) of apostle, evangelist, or pastor does not necessarily, in the above passages, carry a corresponding ability-gift called “apostleship,” “evangelism,” or “pastoring.”

Grudem (2004:1020–1021) concurs,

Moreover, there is some degree of overlap among the gifts listed at various places. No doubt the gift of administration (κυβέρνησις, 1 Cor. 12:28) is similar to the gift of leadership (ὁ προϊστάμενος [from προϊστημι] Rom. 12:8), and both terms could probably be applied to many who have the office of pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11). Moreover, in some cases Paul lists an activity and in other cases lists the related noun that describes the person (such as “prophecy” in Rom. 12:6 and 1 Cor. 12:10, but “prophet” in 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11).

While Grudem does not explain or defend his assertions, it seems reasonable that the 1 Corinthians 12:28 term for “administration” and the Romans 12:8 term for “leadership” could either be synonymous terms (allowing for stylistic differences in different letters on different occasions by the same writer) for the same gift or they could, as Grudem suggests, represent different but similar, overlapping gifts. We encountered the same semantic tension when we looked at the various lists of spiritual graces above (e.g., the similarity or overlap between “kindness” and “goodness” in the list of fruit of the Spirit

in Gal 5). This may also explain why different writers sometimes count the number of specific gifts in different ways.

4. Do the lists in the passages above exhaust all the gifts that the Spirit of God gives? In other words, are the lists a complete catalogue of all the gifts?

On the one hand, while W. G. Putman's (1996:1130) assertion that "the lists of *charismata* in the NT (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11, 28–30; *cf.* Eph 4:7–12) are clearly incomplete" seems probable, it is not provable. It is an argument from silence that goes beyond the New Testament. For example, if one of the lists of gifts ended with a phrase such as "and the like" (*kai ta homoia toutois*), as does the list of the acts of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21, we could affirm Putman's conclusion. The fact that the Spirit gave to the members of the Corinthian church a completely different set of gifts (with prophecy being the only common gift) than he gave to the Roman church does not mean that these sets are the only gifts that the Spirit could give. For this reason, Grudem's (2004:1020) similar conclusion seems to overstep the evidence:

These facts indicate that Paul was not attempting to construct exhaustive lists of gifts when he specified the ones he did. Although there is sometimes an indication of some order (he puts apostles first, prophets second, and teachers third, but tongues last in 1 Cor. 12:28), it seems that in general Paul was almost randomly listing a series of different examples of gifts as they came to mind.

On the other hand, it does not mean that there are other gifts. Apart from New Testament revelation of additional gifts, we cannot be sure. The safest answer we can advance to the question if the gift lists are exhaustive is that we do not know. By his Spirit, Christ the head of his churches gives to each church the specific gifts that that particular church needs to accomplish his purpose. The Spirit's distribution of gifts is his sovereign prerogative. "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (1 Cor 12:11). Depending on the situation, the Spirit could conceivably give gifts to his churches from those listed in the New Testament or gifts not listed. It goes beyond the evidence of the New Testament to suggest that there is one standard, universal set of spiritual gifts that every church has or that every church needs, or to suggest there are other gifts not listed.

5. Can we categorize the Spirit's many gifts, and if so, how? Scholars have attempted to classify the gifts. Putman (1996:1130) contends that "they fall most simply into two main categories—those which qualify their possessors for the ministry of the word and those which equip them for practical service." Putman and others base this dual categorization on 1 Peter 4:10–11's apparent distinction between speaking gifts

(“If anyone speaks”) and serving gifts (“If anyone serves”).

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

Nevertheless, several factors argue against this twofold paradigm. First, Peter gives too little information about the meaning of “serving” and “speaking” to draw such a systematic conclusion. The two terms might simply summarize broadly various ways people minister (Jobes 2005:281) and not a technical categorization of all gifts. Second, this approach does not fit Peter’s context. There is no indication in the text that he intends to present a classification of gifts. The text is illustrational, calling people to use whatever gifts they have to minister to others. As J. Ramsey Michaels (1998:250; cf. Charles 2006:347) notes, “Peter introduces only two examples of ‘God’s diversified grace,’ speaking and serving (in contrast to seven examples in Rom 12:6–8 and nine in 1 Cor 12:7–11).” Third, it seems that the burden of proof lies with Putman and others to show how two verses written by Peter for an illustrational purpose can serve as *the* single organizing key to the lengthy lists and discussion of gifts by Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Fourth, the gift of serving is also found in Romans 12:7, calling into question how the term can serve concurrently *both* as a categorical heading (as suggested by this approach in 1 Peter 4) and as a single gift in a list of gifts (in Romans 12).

Similarly, Walter Elwell and Barry Beitzel (1988:1992) suggest that “for the sake of clarity in analysis they are most simply divided into four groups—revelation, miracles, leadership, and service.” Yet these twofold or fourfold distinctions do not appear evident in the passages themselves, and these authors offer no biblical basis for this division. Carson (1987:37) wisely observes that all attempts to classify the gifts fall short exegetically, including even the best efforts based on the texts themselves (e.g., Carson notes variations in the words for “another,” or variations in the prepositions related to the Spirit). The overlap of individual gifts in the various proposed classifications simply defies categorization. Carson concludes, “On balance, it is best to treat the gifts one by one.” We do not need a classification scheme, and erecting unbiblical, artificial categories could limit one-another ministry for those within the church who do not think they fit into the categories.

6. How many spiritual gifts does each believer have? While it is clear from Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 that every Christian has been given at least one spiritual gift, the passages do not declare if the sovereign Spirit gives *only* one gift to each member. Since he is sovereign, we should not limit his ability to choose to give at least some church members more than one gift. Although Paul's special calling as an apostle could make his case exceptional, it would be surprising, given what we know about his ministry, to imagine that he only possessed one gift. What about church members? Paul seems to allow for the possibility of multiple gifts in 1 Corinthians 14 when he wishes that those who speak in tongues might also prophecy, "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy" (14:5). He also desires that those who speak in tongues would also have the gift of interpretation, "For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say" (14:13). There seems no reason to assume that the New Testament passages preclude the possibilities of a believer having more than one spiritual gift.⁴⁵ The gifts do not seem to be mutually exclusive; some might even function together in complementary ways depending on the needs in the particular church.

7. Does every church get all the gifts listed in the above passages? Or, in a related question, is there a specific set of standard, basic gifts that each church should have or will have? The answer to these related questions is apparently No. The remarkable dissimilarity between the various lists in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 (see Appendix below) mitigate against this notion. Moo's (1996:764) observations on Romans 12 seem sensible, albeit understated:

The gifts in v. 8, however, have no linguistic equivalent in the other lists, although the ministries they denote could well correspond to, or overlap with, some of the gifts listed elsewhere. These texts suggest that Paul, and presumably the early church generally, recognized a small number of well-defined and widely occurring gifts along with an indefinite number of other less-defined gifts, some of which may not have been manifest everywhere and some of which may have overlapped with others.

At the same time, our study of Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 leaves various questions unanswered or uncertain at best:

⁴⁵ By way of personal anecdote, as a Christian and active church member for thirty-nine years, a pastor for thirty years, and a seminary professor for eleven years, I have known many believers who seem to me to have several of the spiritual gifts listed in the New Testament passages above.

8. How does the Spirit decide which gifts he will give to each believer? We do not know. We do know that the bestowal of the gifts is a sovereign, supernatural decision by the Holy Spirit, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:11, “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” We can reasonably infer that, as the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit will provide that church with what Christ the head of the church believes the members of each church need to care for one another and accomplish his purposes.

9. When does God’s Spirit give spiritual gifts to his people? Given the fact that all believers have at least one gift, and that there were surely new Christians among Paul’s readership, we can assume that the Spirit gives gifts at conversion (or at least that the Spirit begins to stir up or enhance the person’s natural abilities, per question 11 below). However, this does not preclude the possibility that the sovereign Spirit can give additional gifts at various points along the individual’s path of Christian experience and maturity, particularly in times of special need in the church.

10. Is each gift that believers receive a permanent endowment? Conversely, might one or more of a person’s gifts be withdrawn (e.g., in the case of apostasy by a professing believer) or replaced by other gifts? We do not know. Grudem (2004:1025) offers helpful insights on this exact question,

In most cases, it seems that the New Testament pictures a *permanent* possession of spiritual gifts. The analogy of the parts of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:12–26 fits this, in that the eye does not become a hand, nor does the ear become a foot, but various parts exist in the body permanently. Moreover, Paul says that some people have titles that describe a continuing function. Some people can be called “prophets” or “teachers” (1 Cor. 12:29) or “evangelists” (Eph. 4:11). We would expect that those people have a permanent possession of the gifts of prophecy, teaching, and evangelism, unless some unusual circumstance would come along which would take that gift away.

After giving some further examples, Grudem concludes, “Therefore it seems that in general the New Testament indicates that people have spiritual gifts given to them and, once they have them, they are usually able to continue to use them over the course of their Christian life.” But Grudem also notes some possible exceptions related, for example, to apostasy.

11. What is the relationship between Spirit-given gifts and a person’s natural abilities and desires that the Spirit might take over and energize? Can the Spirit take one’s natural abilities and sanctify them for Christian purposes, or does a believer only gain new Spirit-imparted abilities that look distinctly different from, or

bear little or no relationship to, the believer's native skills? Discussions along these lines sometimes refer to abilities related to, for example, to music, writing, counselling, or manual skills (e.g., the special gifting God gave his tabernacle designers and builders in Exod 31ff.).

While writers like Ray Stedman (1972:39) assert that a spiritual gift is something each believer "did not possess before he became a Christian," this seems to go beyond the New Testament evidence. There seems no biblical reason to claim that the Spirit cannot quicken a person's native skills with Christ-centred motives and steer those skills from self-centred to other-centred foci. Putman's (1996:1130) conclusion is safer: "In some instances the gifts appear to involve a release or enhancement of natural ability, for example, the gifts of teaching, helping or leadership; others are clearly a special endowment: faith, gifts of healing and the power to work miracles." This is especially likely in light of Putman's footnoted comment, "One might also ask how the doctrine of God's creation of each individual in the womb (Ps 139) and the doctrine of God's election of individual Christians might support the possibilities that some spiritual gifts are enhancements of *God-given* natural abilities." The same God who chose believers before birth and formed them in their mother's womb can augment those natural abilities with additional supernatural powers to serve.

Grudem (2004:1016–1017) agrees, starting with his inclusive definition.

We may define spiritual gifts as follows: *A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.* This broad definition includes both gifts that are related to natural abilities (such as teaching, showing mercy, or administration) and gifts that seem to be more "miraculous" and less related to natural abilities (such as prophecy, healing, or distinguishing between spirits). . . . Yet not every natural ability that people have is included here, because Paul is clear that all spiritual gifts must be empowered "by one and the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:11), that they are given "for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7), and that they are all to be used for "edification" (1 Cor. 14:26), or for building up the church.

There seems no reason why the Spirit cannot, at the time of someone's conversion, take that person's natural, God-given abilities and stir them up for godly usage to minister to one another within the body of Christ.

12. What is the relationship between spiritual gifts and one-another ministry commands? For example, does a one-another ministry command require some kind of corresponding gift to be able to obey the command?

As we saw in Romans 12, the line between a ministry gift and a ministry command is difficult to discern. There seems to be an inseparable functional connection

between gifts (vv. 6–8) and ministries (vv. 9–21). While they are distinct in essence and examinable separately, the gifts and the commanded ministries function together, with the gifts apparently empowering and making effectual the ministries. While Morris (1988:443) asserts, concerning verse 9, “At this point Paul moves from the charismatic gifts, functions exercised by individuals, to virtues he expects to see in all believers,” the list in verses 9–21 looks much more like interpersonal ministry actions than personal virtues. Both sections refer to ministry. While the explicit language of spiritual gifts does not continue, some of these exhortations (e.g., sharing with those in need, v. 13a; hospitality, v.13b) synchronize with various spiritual gifts described in verses 6–8 and in the other gifts passages above. The call to love (“Love must be sincere”) in verse 9 that follows the gift list in verses 6–8 parallels Paul’s call to love in 1 Corinthians 12:31b–14:1 that follows 1 Corinthians 12:1–31a (Moo 1996:773). There seems to be little if any distinction in actual ministry practice between a Spirit-given gift and a Spirit-empowered ministry action (assuming the Spirit’s role in such).

At the same time, these commands are given to each person and there seems no warrant for a believer to not carry out these one-another ministry commands just because the member doesn’t believe he or she possess a specific related gift. In places where a specific gift is mentioned that has a corresponding command in that context or elsewhere, like giving, Erickson’s (1998:1066) counsel seems prudent:

Whenever virtues like faith, service, and giving, which, on biblical grounds, are to be expected of all believers, are represented as special gifts of the Spirit, it appears that the writer has in mind unusual or extraordinary dimensions or degrees of those virtues. The Holy Spirit in his wisdom has given just what is needed, so that the body as a whole may be properly built up and equipped.

In these cases, God’s Spirit apparently stirs up some believers to minister with greater effectiveness.

13. How do believers actually get a spiritual gift? This question involves several related questions: What role do believers play, if any, in receiving these gifts? Should they pray for them, seek to somehow cultivate them, ask pastors to lay hands on them, etc.? How do they know when they have received them, or how they should discover the gifts the Spirit may have already given them?

Both Paul in Romans 12 and Peter in 1 Peter 4 apparently assume that their readers know what their spiritual gifts are, since the thrust of these passages is not to discover them but to exercise them. Yet Paul also encourages the Corinthians to “follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy” (1 Cor

14:1) and to “try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (14:12). How should believers who do not know their gifts come to discover them? The passages give little if any instruction. In at least one case, Paul commends prayer, “For this reason the one who speaks in a tongue should pray that they may interpret what they say” (14:13).

Yet here the silence itself may be instructional. In the absence of a detailed path, perhaps the emphasis in some churches on finding your spiritual gift(s), e.g., through a spiritual gifts inventory, is unbalanced and misguided. One writer offers sober pastoral counsel. After summarizing the ministry purpose of each believer’s gifts, James R. Johnson (1980:17) writes, “What does not follow, however, is that we should be overly concerned about identifying our gifts. In fact, the Bible never teaches that we should. One may assume that the implication is there, but to press this point is to lose sight of the biblical focus and may actually be a reflection of our cultural self-centeredness.” Such over-concern in discovering one’s gift, or the perfectly right gift, could distract a person from seeking to serve others.

At the same time, church leaders and church members can take some practical steps. Grudem (2004:1028–1030) offers practical counsel. He recommends that church leaders provide opportunities for ministry that would be in keeping with the New Testament gift lists and encourage members to pursue them. Church members should discern the ministry needs and opportunities around them; should consider their own interests, desires, abilities, and past ministry affirmations; should pray; and should try ministering in various ways and see what God does.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Personally, the advice I have given as a longtime pastor and counselor (although probably not fully original with me and based on much counsel from others over many years), sounds something like this:

Close your eyes and pray. Ask God’s Spirit to show you how you can best serve him and to show you what gift or gifts He has or will give you. Then open your eyes widely and look around. See the needs in the lives of your fellow church members around you and start serving them according to your abilities and desires. Do so humbly and prayerfully, in the name of Jesus, depending on his Spirit’s help. As you serve, you will discover how God is using you (or not using you), where you sense his blessing and power, where your confidence in him increases, and where other believers affirm you, especially as you seek honest feedback from your church leaders and other mature Christians.

3.4 Conclusion

In our previous chapters we saw that, contrary to their relative neglect in the vast majority of standard systematic theology manuals, the many and varied one-another passages and mutual ministry commands form a major emphasis in the ecclesiology of the New Testament. We especially noted those passages that focused on mutual care, noticing the dearth of treatment by theologians. We also saw that the household churches were likely the primary location for mutual care ministry to take place. In addition, we saw that the members having a self-conscious identity as the body of Christ, the family of God, and God's new priesthood would encourage this kind of one another love.

In this chapter, we have seen the role that the triune God plays in the church members' work of mutual ministry. God's saving grace in Christ provides the motivation, the model, and power to pursue one-another care. God's love, Christ's love, and Christ's self-sacrifice compel believers to love and serve one another. Christlikeness is their ultimate goal. Moreover, the Holy Spirit—who is the Spirit of Christ—dwells within the church and gives the church the relational graces (which are gifts of the Spirit) and the spiritual gifts to enable Christ's followers to love, serve, and care for one another.

In our next chapter, we will look at a variety of specific forms of mutual care ministries that demonstrate practical ways church members view each other, act toward each other, and speak to each other.

Chapter Four

Specific Ministries of Mutual Care

The New Testament describes specific ministry tasks that were done or commanded to be done by the entire church—not merely by church leaders but also by church members. In this chapter, we will explore passages that feature ministry practices assigned to all believers toward one another. Here we see the New Testament church as a caring, serving people.

4.1 Proper Attitudes of Mutual Care

We begin not with words or actions but with a mindset. How do the New Testament writers picture the way church members viewed each other (in Acts) and should view each other (in the epistles)? What attitudes and perspectives should they have and hold toward each other? We can answer this question in five ways.

4.1.1 Viewing Each Other as Fellow Members of the Same Body

First, mutual care by Christians flows from their identity as fellow members of the same body. In chapter one we saw that the foundation of all one-another ministry in the New Testament is the objective work that God has done in Jesus Christ by his Spirit in creating one body, the church, and in joining each Christian to that one body. Paul says in Romans 12:4–5, “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” 1 Corinthians 12:27 draws the same conclusion, “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”

Yet these passages are more than third-person doctrinal descriptions *about* the church (i.e., “the church is a body with many members”). They are second-person appeals *to* the members of the church to self-consciously see and own their identities as co-members of the same body (i.e., “you are members of the body”). Moreover, they carry ministry implications. They have individual—“each of us” (Rom 12:4), “each of you” (1 Cor 12:27)—ministry opportunities and responsibilities to care for each other. As each member embraces his or her identity, the body is poised to do and say the mutual ministry actions below. Furthermore, as we look at those specific ministries of words and actions, we see that they are not merely commands but commands given to

people who belong to each other. Because believers *are* fellow members of the same body (doctrinal fact), each member *should* care for one another (ministry implication).

4.1.2 Viewing Each Other as Brothers and Sisters in the Same Family

Second, as we also saw in chapter one, the church is the family of God. Jesus himself introduced this imagery by calling his disciples “brothers” (Matt 12:46–50; Matt 23:8–9; John 20:17) and by telling them that their fellow believers are their brothers and sisters (Mark 10:29–31; Luke 22:31–32). Moreover, Jesus taught them to view these church-family relationships as more important than their marriage and bloodline relationships. We saw that both Luke the writer (Acts 1:15; 11:29; 14:2; 16:40; 18:18, 27; 21:7, 17; 28:14, 15) and the believers within the Acts narratives referred to believers as brothers and sisters (Acts 1:16; 6:3; 9:17; 11:12; 12:17; 15:7, 13, 23; 21:20; 22:13). We saw that the epistle writers routinely used the same sibling terminology, with Paul alone using *adelphos* language more than one hundred times. Finally, we saw some examples in chapter one (e.g., 1 Cor 1:10–11; Gal 6:1; Jas 4:11; 1 Pet 1:22; etc.), and we will see more below, how the “brothers and sisters” identity becomes a point of motivational appeal in calling Christians to mutual care.

Again, as in the case of their identity as fellow members of the body, the New Testament goes beyond describing them in third-person language as brothers and sisters. Jesus and the apostles actually address them directly as brothers and sisters, Jesus tells the twelve apostles in Matthew 23:8, “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.” In addition, the epistle writers routinely address their readers as “brothers and sisters.”

In the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, *et al.* (2000:127) capture the warmth of true brotherly love.

Paul’s language of brotherly love is passionate, intimate, and affectionate. There is or should be an intensity about the brotherly bond. The Philippian brethren are “beloved and longed-for” (Phil 4:1); he tells the Thessalonians he is “endeavoring eagerly to see your face with great desire” (1 Thess 2:17), and he encourages the church members to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (1 Cor 16:20). It is a language of presence. In contrast, the church is instructed to *honour* secular authority, but to *love* the brotherhood (1 Pet 2:17). (emphasis added)

4.1.3 Viewing Each Other in Harmonious, Same-Minded Ways

A third attitudinal perspective that encourages one-another ministry is a sense of oneness, same-mindedness, and unity among the members. We will explore aspects of this in terms of pursuing peace and resolving conflict in a later section. Nevertheless, here it is worth pausing to consider the mindset of oneness that marked the Jerusalem church in Acts and that the apostles Paul and Peter urged in their letters.

We see this harmonious attitude among the church members in Acts. In Acts 2:44–45, Luke writes, “All the believers were together and had everything in common.” This oneness in mindset led to the generosity depicted in the next verse, “They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.” As Darrel Bock (2007:152) observes, “The quality of mutual caring is highlighted in verses 44–45, as the believers are together and treat everything as belonging to everyone, holding all things as common between them.” Bruce (1988:74) notes their “deep sense of their unity in the Spirit.” We see that same oneness again in Acts 4:32, which again led them to share selflessly their possessions with those in need, “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” Peterson (2009:204) suggests that the expression “one in heart and mind” “implies both friendship and unity of purpose,” and fulfils God’s new covenant promise in Jeremiah 32:39, “I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me. . . .”

We will consider the action of mutual financial care below. Yet it is worth noting at this point that in both of these Acts passages, it is the church’s consciousness of their shared group identity—of belonging to one another—that led them to the mutual ministry actions of caring for one another materially. Commenting on these same passages, Erickson (2013:963) observes, “The Spirit had created in them a stronger consciousness of membership in the group than of individual identity, and so they viewed their possessions not as ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ but as ‘ours.’”

Yet this vision of oneness did not stop with the Jerusalem church. It extended to the churches in the Gentile world. The New Testament letters issues similar calls to same-mindedness and harmony. Paul calls the Romans to “live in harmony with one another” (Rom 12:16), the Corinthians to “be of one mind” with each other (2 Cor 13:11), and the Philippians to “be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Phil 2:2, cf. the similar image as in Acts 4:32 above). Peter writes to “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia,

Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1), calling all of them to “be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (3:8). Karen Jobes (2005:214) observes that Peter’s five terms were used in the Greco-Roman world

with reference to kinship obligations. Peter feels free to apply to the Christian community terms commonly used of family relationships, apparently following the thought that their new birth generated by God the Father (1:3–4) makes the Christian community into a family. Peter suggests that his readers have kinship obligations to one another that are expected of biological kin in that society.

Here we see that the family metaphor we reviewed in 4.1.2 above includes oneness and harmony, and how these same qualities both characterized the church in Jerusalem and expressed the attitudinal ideals that the apostles Paul and Peter desired for the churches.

4.1.4 Viewing Each Other with Acceptance as Those Accepted by God

While we can trace the above mindsets back to gospel themes, a fourth one-another attitude arises explicitly from God’s redemptive work in Christ. Romans 15:7 calls members to “accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” The gospel of God’s acceptance in Christ of all who believe in Christ—Jew or Gentile—is a major theme in Romans (e.g., 1:16–17; 10:11–13). In light of God’s willingness to receive all who believe in Christ, Paul calls the Roman church to do the same. This means overcoming whatever the weak/strong divisions (note the 14:1–15:6 context and the *dio*, “then,” that starts 15:7) or the Jewish/Gentile divisions (note the ensuing context in 15:8–12) that existed in the church in Rome.

We discover four directives about mutual acceptance in verse 7 and its 14:1–15:6 context (in light of the *dio* in v. 7). First, believers should accept one another “just as Christ accepted them.” As we saw in chapter three, believers should love one another because God the Father and God the Son have loved them, they should serve one another sacrificially because Christ has served them, etc. We see the same indicative-imperative dynamic in this text. Mutual care flows from God’s saving grace.

Second, believers should accept one another despite their personal differences. The context of Romans 14:1–15:7 records at least two conscientious differences among believers: eating meat versus eating vegetables only (14:2–3, 6b, 14–15, 17, 20–21, 23) and observing one day as sacred (probably the Jewish Sabbath) versus observing every day alike (14:5–6a). Both sides must learn to accept one another and not look down on or judge one another (14:1–3, 9–13). The readers are to welcome each other, despite their differences, as Christ welcomed them. As we noted in chapter two, the fact that the

church in Rome likely consisted of various house churches might have contributed to personal differences. Schreiner (1998:789) observes,

We do not know how many house churches existed in Rome at this time, nor do we have details on how they functioned. The presence of various churches, however, may also explain the tensions between the “strong” and the “weak” in Rome if differing customs were observed in the various churches.”

Third, believers should show their acceptance for one another by ministering to one another. Acceptance implies not only cessation of judgment but also engagement in service. Within the context of Romans 14–15 we see that acceptance requires believers to limit their own liberties in light of each other’s consciences (4:13,15b,20; 15:1–3); to value righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit above their personal preferences (4:14,19); and to build up (14:19; 15:2), do good (15:2); and please others (15:3). Gospel acceptance breeds mutual care and edification.

Fourth, believers should accept one another to bring praise to God. The purpose of this mutual acceptance is “so that (*hina*) with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 6). In turn, they would together “bring praise to God” (v. 7, also vv. 8–12) and together enjoy the hope that the God of hope promises to both Jewish and Gentile Christians (vv. 12–13). The picture that emerges in verses 5–12 is that of believing Gentiles included in the people of God and joining with the believing Jews in the worship of God by all nations. The attitude of mutual acceptance is foundational for this vision.

4.1.5 Viewing Each Other with Feelings of Empathy

In this section, we will look at two passages from Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 that urge members to connect emotionally with one another. In other words, mutual care includes seeking to feel the joys and struggles of fellow members. We will then conclude this section with a suggested Christological motive for empathizing with others.

4.1.5.1 Rejoicing and mourning in Romans 12. Amid a series of pointed commands in Romans 12:14–21 on how to act toward one another and toward persecutors, Paul calls church members to empathize with one another. Verse 15 says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” Because it follows verse 14’s call to bless those who persecute them, some commentators (e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield 1979:641; David Daube in Morris 1998:450) suggest that Paul is referring to

the readers' relationships with outsiders. This is plausible, of course. Jesus called his followers to love their enemies (e.g., Luke 6:27–36) and to show compassionate concern for strangers (Luke 10:25–37). In fact, several commentators suggest that there could be wider application to all relationships (Schreiner 1998:667; Osborne 2004:335; Dunn 1998:746).

However, these and most other commentators (e.g., Moo 1996:781), see that verse 15 signals both a shift in style (grammatical infinitives) and a shift in theme (with a “one another” in verse 16) that point more directly to mutual Christian care. Kruse (2012:479) and Schreiner (1998:671) concur, seeing the context as distinguishing between how Christians treat each other (vv. 9–13, 15–16) and how they relate to hostile outsiders (vv. 14, 17–21). Along these lines, Harrison and Hagner (2008:191) observe, “The verse calls Christians to rejoice and mourn with fellow believers. This empathy transcends any mere natural human concern for one’s fellow human; it flows explicitly and supernaturally from their shared membership in the one body of Christ (12:4–5).”

Contextually, this empathy reflects the “sincere love” of verse 9 and the “sharing” together of verse 13 (Osborne 2004:335). Commenting on this passage, John Stott (2001:333) also connects verse 15 with the nature of Christian love, “Love never stands aloof from other people’s joys or pains. Love identifies with them, sings with them and suffers with them. Love enters deeply into their experiences and their emotions, their laughter and their tears, and feels solidarity with them, whatever their mood.” Moreover, verse 15 and the call in the next verse to “live in harmony with one another” are closely connected. In other words, true oneness and mutual care involve emotional components of rejoicing and mourning. “The Christian is not to be indifferent to the joys and sorrows of others” (Morris 1998:450).

What do these two commands entail? At first glance, one might suppose that rejoicing with those who rejoice is the easier of the two poles that Paul addresses. Yet the Church father Chrysostom (1889:507) insightfully notes that

it requires more of a high Christian temper to rejoice with those who do rejoice than to weep with those who weep. For this nature itself fulfils perfectly: and there is none so hard-hearted as not to weep over him that is in calamity: but the other requires a very noble soul, so as not only to keep from envying, but even to feel pleasure with the person who is in esteem. And this is why he placed it first.

Schreiner (1998:668) agrees, “We are all inclined to shed a sympathizing tear with those who are suffering, but envy and a sense of competition often hinder us from truly

rejoicing with those who rejoice.” Moo (1996:782) also observes, “Love that is genuine will not respond to a fellow believer’s joy with envy or bitterness, but will enter wholeheartedly into that same joy.” Those within the body who are tempted to think of themselves more highly than they should—the problem Paul raised in verse 3—will in turn have a difficult time rejoicing in the successes and blessings of others. Fitzmyer (in Kruse 2012:480) concurs with Chrysostom and even suggests that this is why Paul put rejoicing as the first command (although such an assumption seems a bit speculative).

What about the flipside in verse 15, the call to “mourn with those who mourn?” The infinitive verb *klaiein*, translated here as mourn, is usually translated as “weep” in narrative accounts where physical tears are in view. Paul uses the verb in two other places. In 1 Corinthians 7:30 he tells those who mourn to live as if they did not mourn. In Philippians 3:18 he describes his own tears—we do not know if this is literal or figurative—as he contemplates those who oppose the gospel. The focus in our passage suggests empathetic attitude more than necessarily an expression of literal tears. Dunn (1998:746) notes that “such genuine empathy (feeling with; cf. particularly Gaugler⁴⁷) with those benefiting or suffering from the ups and downs of daily existence” counters the Stoic ideal of “impassiveness.” Osborne (2004:335) believes that the mourning here in verse 15 might be linked to the persecution envisioned in verse 14 (“Bless those who persecute you”).

What does Romans 12:15 mean for the local church as God’s place of mutual Christian care? Commenting on this verse, Robert Mounce (1995:239) offers a meaningful vision: “God’s will is that his children become a family where the joys of one become the joys of all and the pain of one is gladly shared by all the others. The Christian experience is not one person against the world but one great family living out together the mandate to care for one another.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Dunn does not provide a reference for Gaugler in the text or the section bibliography but in his Commentary Bibliography he includes this entry: “E. Gaugler. 2 vols. Zurich: Zwingli, 1945, ²1958; 1952.” We presume Dunn refers to Gaugler’s commentary, *Der Römerbrief*.

⁴⁸ It is perhaps indicative of the lack of emphasis on mutual care in the church and the need for our thesis that very few commentators on Romans 12:15 mention anything substantive about what it means for Paul’s readers to rejoice or to mourn as fellow members of the same body.

4.1.5.2 Mutual concern, suffering, and rejoicing in 1 Corinthians 12

In chapter three we addressed the problem in Corinth, discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12, of some church members feeling superior to other members and viewing their spiritual gifts as superior to the gifts of others. In that setting, the apostle urged the members to resist such disunity and to adopt an attitude of mutual care for each member. “But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (12:24–25). The Corinthians viewed some members as more honourable (e.g., those spoke in tongues) and others as less honourable (e.g., those who did not speak in tongues). For the sake of unity, Paul appeals to the readers to recognize that God has invested with honour even those members that the Corinthians wrongly disparaged.

The antidote for favouritism and divisiveness is “equal concern for each other.” The word “concern,” also translatable as “care,” is a verbal form of *merimnaō* (nineteen times in the New Testament), a term that, along with its nominal forms (six times), can have a negative sense of worry or anxiousness or a positive sense of care or concern, depending on the specific context. Here it carries the positive sense, as in 1 Corinthians 7:32–34; 2 Corinthians 11:28; and Philippians 2:20 (where Paul highlight’s Timothy’s others-centered concern for the church). Commenting on our passage, Thistleton (2000:1011) explains,

As it is, the *care* or concern (μεριμνῶσιν, subjunctive of μεριμνάω) of a given individual or group should have been directed not at their own standing or role, but equally at the standing or role of the whole body. . . . In modern psychological terms we might say, “Sublimate your preoccupations with your own gifts and status by transferring them equally to all others within the community.”

Thistleton also notes that the term the NIV translates as “equal” (τὸ αὐτό, the same) is emphatic. Paul’s focus in verses 25–26 is on *mutual* concern.

Paul continues in verse 26, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.” The point of verse 26 is one of the “profound solidarity between the members of the body” (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:608). “Suffering *and* rejoicing together are a sign of unity in which each one truly seeks the advantage of the other” (Garland 2003:598). Verbrugge’s (2008:368–369) comments on verse 26 provide a powerful summary of Paul’s concern for the church:

Paul expresses the emotional unity that should be present in the church. If one member of the church experiences an honour of any sort, this is not the time for

others to get jealous and attempt to steal the spotlight or downgrade that individual. Rather, we should all rejoice with that person. By the same token, if one member experiences pain of any sort—physical, emotional, relational, economic, etc.—then all the other members of the body should be there for that individual and rally around him or her. What is natural in the human body (i.e., a malfunction in any single part of the body can lead to the entire person’s feeling sick and out of commission) should also be apparent in the body of Christ.

As we will see below, this attitude of mutual concern is foundational to the one-another actions and words that demonstrate mutual Christian care.

4.1.5.3 Mutual Empathy Embodied in the Empathetic Christ. Before concluding this section, in keeping with the Christocentric emphasis we saw in our previous chapter, we observe that the call in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 for church members to empathize with one another is nothing less than the empathy that Jesus displayed in his earth ministry and continues to display toward his people. Seven times the Gospel writers use the term compassion to describe Jesus’s ministry of healing people (Matthew 20:34; Mark 1:4), exorcising demons from people (Mark 9:22), feeding people (Mark 6:34; 8:2), resurrecting people (Luke 7:13), and teaching, preaching, and healing people (Matthew 9:36). His parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son both picture the loving Samaritan and the forgiving father as filled with compassion (Luke 10:33; 15:20).

We can also think of how Jesus showed special care for his own disciples. He knows his own sheep and he calls them by name (John 10:1–18, 27–30). In John 15:11–15 Jesus lets the Twelve into his inner thoughts and plans. He wants them to share in his joy. He describes his own self-sacrificial love for them. Furthermore, Jesus’s self-disclosure to them distinguishes them not only as his servants but also as his friends, because true friendship lets others into our struggles. As Carson (1991:523) observes,

An absolute potentate demands obedience in all his subjects. His slaves, however, are simply told what to do, while his friends are informed of his thinking, enjoy his confidence and learn to obey with a sense of privilege and with full understanding of their master’s heart. So also here: Jesus’ absolute right to command is in no way diminished, but he takes pains to inform his friends of his motives, plans, purposes.

Morris’s (1995:599) concisely summarizes it: “He has called them ‘friends.’ He has kept nothing back from them. He has revealed to them all that the Father has made known to him.” Jesus models for his people the kind of relational openness that can lead to the mutual empathy pictured in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

Moreover, Christ's present reign—his session at God's right hand—is marked by deep concern for his people. In his incarnation, Jesus entered the world of suffering people to take upon himself their feelings and struggles (Heb 2:10–18) but now that he has ascended he continues empathize with his people. As Hebrews 4:15 explains, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” The double negative (“we do not have . . . unable”) functions to stress his empathetic ability amid his followers' weaknesses and temptations. O'Brien (2010:182–183) summarizes Christ's capacities,

Mention of Jesus being *able* to *empathize* recalls his being ‘*able* to help’ (2:18), and anticipates his being ‘*able* to deal gently’ (5:2), ‘*able* to save’ his people completely (7:25), and *able* to perfect their consciences (10:1, 11). The verb rendered *empathize* was used of a bond similar to a mother's feeling for her children or one brother's feeling for another. This empathy, however, extends beyond the sharing of feelings (i.e., compassion), and includes the element of active help towards those who suffer (10:34). Here in v. 15 the stress falls on the capacity of the exalted high priest to help those who are helpless.

Christlike empathy, then, includes not only feeling what others feel but also a desire to help the other person (Ellingworth 1993:268). For our thesis purposes, this section 4.1.5 (Viewing Each Other with Feelings of Empathy) leads to our next section below (4.2 Proper Actions of Mutual Care).

While the writer to the Hebrews does not make an *explicit* indicative-imperative connection (e.g., Christ empathizes with his people, therefore they should empathize with each other), we can derive such a dynamic theologically when we place these Hebrews 2 and 4 passages (Christ's empathy toward his people) next to these Romans 12:15 and 1 Corinthians 12:26 verses (believers should empathize with each other). Just as church members are called to love others, serve others, and forgive others because Jesus did that for them, so they are to empathize—to rejoice and mourn and suffer—with one another because Jesus has demonstrated such emotional solidarity and attitudinal oneness with them.

4.2 Proper Actions of Mutual Care

In this section, we will consider various ministries of mutual care that primarily involve actions. Of course, speaking ministries would often attend these activities. These actions are particularly noteworthy in light of the suffering that the early church

experienced in the midst of economic problems and civil and religious opposition. We will look at six forms of ministry action.

4.2.1 Affectionate Greetings and the Holy Kiss/the Kiss of Love

The verb “greet” (*aspazomai*) appears frequently in Acts and the epistles. We can organize these passages into three categories. (1) In some instances Paul (Acts 18:22; Acts 21:7; 21:19; Rom 16:5, 10, 11; Col 4:15; 1 Thess 5:26; Phil 4:21; Titus 3:15), his assistant Tertius (Rom 16:22), or another writer (Heb 13:24; 3 John 15) greets a church. (2) In other passages Paul greets twenty-nine individuals (Rom 16:3–15; 2 Tim 4:19), along with six groups of people associated with them (Rom 5a; 10b, 11b, 14, 15, 2 Tim 4:19b). (3) On still other occasions—twenty times—an epistle writer conveys greetings to the readers from others (Rom 16:16, 21, 23a, 23b; 1 Cor 16:19a, 19b, 20; 2 Cor 13:13; Col 4:10, 12, 14; 2 Tim 4:21; Phil 4:21, 22; Titus 3:15; Phlm 23; Heb 13:24b; 1 Pet 5:13; 2 John 13; 3 John 15).

How should we think of these greetings? Without examining each verse, we can make three observations about Paul’s greeting of individuals in Romans 16:3–16, the most extended list of greetings in any of his letters. First, he was conscious of their identity in Christ and the common bond that he and they shared in Christ (vv. 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). Second, in virtually every verse Paul says something specific and personal about them, referring to matters like their acts of ministry, their labour in the gospel with him (or perhaps apart from him), the unique relationship Paul has with them, etc. As Schreiner (1998:789–790) notes, “The greetings express the solidarity and affection between those who belong to the Lord. They are not merely secular ‘hellos’ but are rooted in the new life of Christ. . . . In most cases Paul says something specific about the persons greeted” (although I believe Schreiner’s “most cases” is an understatement). Third, as Harrison and Hagner (2008:237) note, we see the prominence of both men and women in the list. Women were actively involved in Paul’s ministry and Paul greeted them warmly and esteemed them highly.

While this is an example of an apostle greeting a church and not an example of members greeting each other, to the extent that Paul set a model for ministry, we can infer that he desired the members to greet one another in similar ways, based on their shared identity and reflecting personal warmth.

What we can consider, however, are five New Testament epistolary verses. On five occasions, the apostle Paul (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26)

and the apostle Peter (1 Pet 5:14) urged their readers to greet one another with a kiss. Paul’s version in each case is “Greet one another with a holy kiss (φιλήματι ἁγίῳ).” Peter’s expression is “Greet one another with the kiss of love (φιλήματι ἀγάπης).” Referring to Paul’s readers in Rome, Corinth, and Thessalonica, Kruse (2012:572) writes, “Paul’s repeated exhortations to Christian communities in three major cities to ‘greet one another with a holy kiss’ suggests that this had become a common way for believers to welcome one another in the mid-first century.”⁴⁹

Simon Kistemaker (1993:610; 1997:459) describes this standard practice in the early church as including a “mutual embrace” and “a light touch of the lips against the cheeks, both left and right, common in many societies in the Middle East and elsewhere.” While most commentators (Kistemaker, Kruse 2012:572, Grudem 1988:209, and Michaels 1998:313) understand the term holy merely to mean non-sexual, devoid of erotic implications, Green (2002:271), however, goes beyond this with a better explanation,

This kiss is described as *holy*, not necessarily to distinguish it from the erotic kiss but rather to identify it with the common life of those who were “holy ones” or “saints.” As such, the adjective *holy* reinforces the bond between them that the kiss itself symbolizes and separates this symbol of their unity from the kisses they would exchange with others in their world.

Green’s explanation seems to fit the New Testament sense of “holy,” since even non-Christians in that culture would not view a normal social kiss as sexual, so Paul would not need the adjective “holy” in his letters if that is all that he intended to say. Garland’s (2003:773) perspective complements Green’s view,

This kiss is more than an extension of social custom, since it is identified as “holy.” It was a distinctive practice that served as “a sign of mutual fellowship among persons of mixed social background, nationality, race, and gender who are joined together as a new family in Christ. For those who came from differing ethnic and national backgrounds it was a means to express their unity” (Garland 1999:554–55). The holy kiss becomes a token of the joy, love, reconciliation, peace, and communion that all Christians (slave and free, Jew and Gentile, Greek and Roman, patron and client) have in Christ and with one another.

A holy kiss—in the fullness of the New Testament sense of “holy”—distinguishes believers from those outside of Christ and signals the grace, unity, and love that marks the truest forms of mutual Christian care.

We can raise four questions about these texts. First, do the respective Pauline and Petrine versions mean the same action? A significant majority of commentators on

⁴⁹ See also Kruse (2012:573–574) for his excursus, “Additional Note: Kissing.”

Pauline (Keener 1993:Ro.16:16; Moo 1996:926; Kistemaker 1997:459; Schreiner 1998:798; Ryken, *et al.* 2000:127,482; Green 2002:270) and Petrine (Grudem 1988:209; Michaels 1998:313; Green 2002:270–271; Charles 2006:356) texts see the two expressions—a holy kiss and a kiss of love—as synonymous and their differences merely stylistic. Both would express a kiss that is both holy and motivated by love. Peter Davids (1990:204), however, believes that Paul’s kiss is more formal—part of a liturgical expression—and Peter’s kiss is more of an affectionate greeting. Yet that position assumes Paul’s “holy kiss” is liturgical (see the next question below).

Second, was this an affectionate greeting or part of a liturgical expression? While all agree that a kiss was a common form of greeting in the ancient world, commentators vary as to whether these passages refer merely to a greeting of affection or to some more formal aspect of liturgical activity. Schreiner (1998:798; cf. Elwell & Beitzel 1988:1291 and many others) argues that “it should not be understood as a part of the liturgy but as a means whereby believers demonstrated their warm affection for one another.” Garland (2003:772–773), Bruce (1985:276), and others reference the second century liturgical practice of the “kiss of peace,” described by Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, 65, but we have no evidence of such occurring in the first century when Paul and Peter wrote their letters. Given the lack of evidence for such a practice, Moo (1996:926) is properly agnostic. However, he notes, “many commentators think that Paul may here be envisaging a worship gathering in which his letter is being read aloud and which is concluded with such a kiss.” Green (2002:270–271; cf. Davids 1990:204) supposes a similar scenario:

The exhortations in both this and the following verses presuppose that the church gathered for the reading of this letter so that all might receive the instruction, even the illiterate among them (cf. Col. 4:16; 1 Tim. 4:13). At the end, they should engage in a mutual greeting that would express their solidarity,” including the holy kiss.

While this is plausible in light of the placement of this instruction at the end of each letter, especially given the instructions in the Thessalonian letter, we simply do not know what actually happened in these churches. Garland (2003:772–773) envisions some other occasions, but the safest conclusion to draw about these kisses seems to be that they were warm greetings of affection for one’s brothers and sisters that later also became a liturgical practice.

Third, was this practice commended for all the churches that Paul and Peter started (or at least oversaw), or was it confined to specific churches? While some

commentators suggest that the apostles particularly urged these greetings with a kiss for churches that faced conflict, Schreiner (1998:798) responds, “Evidence for divisions in 1 Thessalonians is meagre, and the reference in 1 Peter suggests that the greeting was common among early Christians.” Green (2002:271), however, notes that the Thessalonians did face some relational tensions (5:13–15, 19–20), making this explanation possible although unprovable, especially in light of Peter’s use with readers who were not necessarily facing conflict with each other. Nor would this theory explain the absence of the call for a holy kiss in epistles like Philippians where the readers were experiencing some measures of conflict.

Fourth, assuming the above answers to the previous questions, what would be the best application in our day in cultures that do not naturally express greetings with a kiss? Marshall (1991:en.loc.) voices a wise concern about contextualizing this New Testament practice:

Here is a good example of where the cultural significance of a particular action must be taken into account. If, for whatever reason, kissing is inappropriate, some other culturally acceptable substitute should surely be adopted in its place. The danger is to do nothing, keeping other Christians at arm’s length. In the Christian fellowship there ought to be a greater degree of mutual love and care, especially for single and lonely people, than in society and large, and the church may well need to take the lead in showing love to such people and in confirming and conveying it to them by suitable symbolic actions.

Not only must the church not use an inappropriate form of greeting, it must express deeper love and care than the greeting of the surrounding culture.

What might this look like? Commenting on Romans 16:16 and citing the other verses above, (Schreiner 1998:798) notes that the holy kiss it was “a common greeting in early Christian communities” and that

The handshake seems to have virtually replaced the biblical kiss as the normative Christian greeting. Regardless of how mutual esteem is shown, true love’s expression begins with paying homage to God’s Son—by faith “kissing” him (Ps 2:12). All godly displays of brotherly affection must spring from that loving dedication to him.

Schreiner apparently writes from the perspective of his North American culture, since in many places throughout the world, and even among various ethnicities in the United States, such a holy kiss is a common greeting among Christians.⁵⁰ Yet even within the

⁵⁰ On a personal note, I travel annually to teach in Brazil where such expressive greetings are common. Even within my church in Raleigh, North Carolina, where I serve as an elder, the members of our Spanish Bible Fellowship (representing over a

Anglo American circles in which both Schreiner and I live, we might ask if a handshake truly approximates the warmth and affection of a Pauline holy kiss or a Petrine kiss of love. Moreover, per Marshall above, we might ask if a handshake expresses the distinctive depth and care that a Pauline or Petrine kiss expresses, since a handshake is a common social greeting even among non-Christians in our Anglo American culture.

Commenting on 1 Peter 5:14, Grudem's (1988:209) counsel seems prudent and better captures the apostolic goal:

Although we may dismiss this as simply a custom belonging to first-century culture, we would do well to recognize the benefits in interpersonal relationships that come from such close physical expressions of friendship and fellowship in Christ. It is much harder to get mad at someone you have just hugged or kissed, and it is much easier to feel accepted in a fellowship that has given such a warm welcome! 'Give each other a handshake all round' (Phillips) is far too distant and formal—probably a 'holy hug' would come much closer to fulfilling Peter's intention. And it should be a genuine expression of *love* in Christ.

As we move forward to explore ways that New Testament church members did show or should have shown mutual Christian care, an excellent start place seems to be with affectionate greetings.

4.2.2 Eating Together

In this section we will consider two contrasting passages, both picturing the members of the church eating together.

4.2.2.1 Acts 2:42–47. One way that the believers in Acts expressed their newfound oneness in Christ and their mutual care for one another was through various forms of relational fellowship, including meeting together in their homes for shared meals. As Jesus frequently ate with his disciples in the Gospel narratives, so the early church's members enjoyed communal meals.

We see this occurring in two places in Acts 2:42–47.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere

dozen nationalities) frequently greet each other with hugs and holy kisses as described above.

hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Verse 42 lists four terms that describe the practice of these new Christians in Jerusalem. While some writers have viewed these as specific steps in a liturgical sequence within a church gathering, Peterson (2009:160) represents the common view, i.e., that this is a summary of the practices the believers took, with 2:43–47 expanding the verse 42 summary statement.

After mentioning their devotion to the apostles' teaching, verse 42 mentions fellowship (*tē koinonia*). The term generally means to share in something or to share with someone in something and can be translated as association, communion, or fellowship (Bock 2007:150). What did this entail? After mentioning things like sharing possessions, being one in heart and mind, and distributing food, Peterson (2009:160–161; also Bock 2007:150;) favours a broad sense. He concludes, “It may be best, therefore, to give *koinōnia* its widest interpretation in 2:42, including within its scope ‘contributions, table fellowship, and the general friendship and unity which characterized the community’.” In other words, the term fellowship itself in verse 42 might have included eating together. It is also possible to see the next item, the breaking of bread, as a communal meal that expresses the more general term fellowship. Polhill (1995:119) writes,

Since fellowship appears in a list in Acts 2:42, it is not easy to determine its exact nuance in this context. The key may be to see the terms “breaking of bread” and “prayer” in apposition to “fellowship.” The meaning would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together.

Yet, whether the term fellowship included meals or not, the term breaking of bread (*tē klasei tou artou*) likely did. Virtually every commentator believes Luke is describing church members enjoying a meal in each other's homes (Polhill 1995:119; Peterson 2009:161). Citing also verse 46, Peterson argues that the breaking of bread “most obviously refers to the common meals shared by the earliest disciples in their homes.” While the Lord's Supper could have been part of these meals (see below), Peterson (161) gives three reasons why we should not understand the breaking of bread phrase as some kind of technical term for a separate Lord's Supper observance apart from ordinary meals: (The enumeration is mine.)

- (1) The phrase itself simply describes the initiation of an ordinary meal in the Jewish fashion of breaking a loaf with the hands and giving thanks to God

(e.g., Lk. 9:16; 22:19; 24:30, 35; Acts 27:35 note). To ‘break bread’ was to eat together.

- (2) When Luke mentions in v. 46 that they were ‘breaking bread in their homes’, he goes right on to say (literally), ‘they were partaking of food’ (*metelambanon trophēs*). What is the ground for giving the expression a different meaning in v. 42?
- (3) The adoption of this term as a title for the Lord’s Supper is not formally attested until the second century AD (cf. *Did.* 14.1; Ignatius, *Eph.* 20.2).

Peterson continues,

The reality of Christian fellowship was expressed from the earliest times in the ordinary activity of eating together. But these meals were doubtless given a special character by the fact that they were associated with teaching, prayer, and praise. They ate together *with glad and sincere hearts* (v. 46), and this gladness issued in *praising God* (v. 47).

It appears likely that verses 42 and 46 together make it clear that the believers ate together in their homes, and that those meals involved the various types of Christian activities listed above.

Did these fellowship meals in Acts also include a special remembrance of the Lord, what 1 Corinthians 11 below will refer to as the Lord’s Supper? Possibly. Bock (2007:150–151) admits, “It is unclear here whether the phrase refers to the Lord’s Supper (so NLT) or is a reference to taking some meals together, of which the Lord’s Supper was a part.” He notes that 2:46 suggests a broad sense of meals but that 20:7 suggests the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. Bock concludes, “What makes the choice hard to decide is that the Lord’s Table was part of a larger meal in the earliest church.” Bock apparently alludes to the fact that Jesus instituted it during a meal and that it was celebrated in 1 Corinthians as a meal, so we cannot tell from Acts 2 whether the meals envisioned in verses 42 and 26 were meals only or meals with a commemoration of the Lord’s Supper. Peterson (2009:160) likewise allows for the possibility that the meals here could have or might not have included the Supper:

Perhaps as they gave thanks for their food they focused also on the person and work of the Lord Jesus, reminding one another of the basis of their fellowship in him. In this way, a meal could be given the same sort of significance that Paul ascribed to the community suppers at Corinth (1 Cor. 10:16–17; 11:17–34).

Other writers, however, are more certain that the meal, at least in verse 42, did include the component of the Lord’s Supper. Commenting on verse 42, Schnabel (2012:en.loc.) favours this view.

The “breaking of bread” is best understood as a reference to the ordinary meals which the believers regularly shared, during which they remembered Jesus’

death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and for the establishment of the new covenant, linked with the command to remember Jesus and his sacrifice during meals (cf. Luke 22:14–22).

Schnabel then likens this to his understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 where “the Lord’s Supper was commemorated in connection with ordinary, regular meals which the believers shared.” He also notes that this was the practice with shared meals that occurred in both the temple precincts and private homes (Acts 2:46–47).

After admitting the complexity of the debate, Longenecker (2007:757) mentions some options beyond ordinary meals. It might be some type of Jewish fellowship meal devoid of any paschal significance, some kind of early commemoration of Christ’s death in line with Paul’s later elaboration, or an *agapē* feast that emphasized the joy of communion with the risen Lord and of fellowship with one another (in line with Paul’s later understanding). “The matter is somewhat difficult to determine,” notes Longenecker, since passages like 2:42 and 20:7 point him toward the Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 10:16; and 11:24 commemorations, yet 2:46 and Luke’s use elsewhere of “breaking bread” point him to an ordinary meal (cf. Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 20:11; 27:35). Longenecker’s conclusion on verse 42 seems persuasive,

Yet it is difficult to believe that Luke meant only an ordinary meal in 2:42, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as “the fellowship” and “prayer.” Every meal among Jews, of course, would have had something of a sacred character. And in a Christian setting, where hearts were warmed by devotion, it would have been an occasion for joy, love, and praise, with all such devotion inevitably connected with Jesus’ ministry and death on behalf of his people. Probably, therefore, “the breaking of bread” should be understood here in v. 42 not only as denoting joyful devotion to Jesus but also as connoting the passion of Christ, although there may well have been a deepening of understanding with regard to Christ’s passion as the church’s theology came more into focus, in accord with Paul’s later elaboration of it.

Polhill (1995:119) likewise concludes, “Joined with fellowship, it would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper. It probably also involved as well their participation in a main *agapē* meal together.”

Marshall (1980:88–89) also views this as the Lord’s Supper (apparently in the context of a meal), suggesting that Luke is “simply using an early Palestinian name for the Lord’s Supper in the proper sense.”

Concerning verse 46, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,” the commentators again differ. Peterson (2009:163–164), Longenecker (2007:758), and Bock (2007:153–154) view this passage as a meal and not

as inclusive of the Supper, while Polhill (1995:121–122), Marshall (1980:91), and Schnable (2012:*en.loc*) believe that the Lord’s Supper is also in view.

In terms of our thesis, both verses in their 2:42–47 context picture fellowship, love, oneness, and mutual caring that occur in the setting of joyous meals together in each other’s homes. Based on the above, I believe, albeit not strongly, that some form of the Lord’s Supper was probably part of these gatherings, especially in verse 42. Yet even if there were no actual commemorations of the bread and the cup, or if their understanding of the Supper as symbolizing Christ’s substitutionary atonement was unclear or immature, the larger context would lead us to assume that there was an evident Christ-centeredness and a consciousness of his Spirit’s presence among them.

4.2.2.2 1 Corinthians 11:17–24. When we come to 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, the scene sadly changes. Here we find the Lord’s Supper celebrated in the context of a communal meal, but Paul is upset. Verses 17–22 couch the entire section in an apostolic rebuke:

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

The practice of the having the Lord’s Supper set within an agape feast, of course, was not the problem. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:552) explain,

As in the case of the last supper the Corinthians were evidently celebrating their version of the Lord’s Supper in the context of a full meal (full, at least, for some of the members but not for all of them). The meal was evidently sandwiched between the opening blessing associated with the bread and the final words regarding the cup. In this way the entire meal was provided with religious significance. This verse as well as vv. 27–32 makes it clear that the meal itself was to be understood in terms of the reaffirmation and ratification of the new covenant between God and his people.

The problem Paul addresses was their attitude and actions concerning the meal. Fee (1987:535–536) summarizes it succinctly: They “assembled together” (vv. 17, 18, 22) and they “ate” (vv. 20–22), but with “divisions” (vv. 18–19, 21, 22) among them and not unity. “As they assemble together to eat the Lord’s Supper, instead of being

‘together’ they are being sundered apart by the activities of some who are going ahead with their own private meals, thus despising the church by shaming those who have nothing.” They do more harm than good (v. 17) because they further divide the body (a mega theme in 1 Corinthians introduced as early as in 1:10) and they abuse the meaning of the Supper that Jesus called them to do in remembrance of him. Ciampa and Rosner (2010:543) explain the harm,

The following verse highlights the divisions that have been created in the church, but Paul goes on to accuse the Corinthians of “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (v. 27) and eating and drinking judgment on themselves (v. 29), which is why some members of the community were sick and some have died (v. 30). The good the meetings should have done would be, according to the broader context, that of building up the church through love (8:1; chs. 12–14), bringing glory to God (10:31), and receiving his approval (11:19).

Moreover, they not only neglect to care properly for their poorer brothers and sisters, they humiliate them (vv. 21–22).

The humiliation was carried out by distinguishing between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in the provision of food before, during, or after the Lord’s Supper. That they were gathered as *the church of God* should have been enough to remind them that they constituted a covenant community in which each member found a place through God’s gracious redemption and not through their own social status, achievements, or qualities. God’s special concern for his covenant people would make such humiliation of the poor among his people by other members of the same community even more egregious. (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:547)

However, to make matters worse, this was not just any meal. It was supposed to be the Lord’s Supper. Paul’s thinking seems to run like this: Not only do you humiliate the members of your own church body (vv. 20–22) in your meal, you then dare to partake of the Lord’s Supper (vv. 23–25)! This is not the “Lord’s” Supper (v. 20), but an abuse of it (v. 27). Garland (2003:537) captures the rebuke, with its sad irony: “Paul views these divisions as nullifying the very purpose for gathering together for worship in the name of Christ. It contradicts what the Lord’s Supper proclaims as the foundation of the church: Christ’s sacrificial giving of his life for others.” Ciampa and Rosner (2010:545–546) add,

What the Corinthians were participating in could not be considered *the Lord’s Supper* since that supper was marked by the unity of those who had become one body in Christ and by a recognition that the Lord who presided over that supper was the one who had given up his own prerogatives and sacrificed his own life for those who were unworthy.”

Amid the abuse of the Supper, they have lost sight of the self-sacrificial Saviour whose self-denying love and service even to the lowliest and poorest member they must imitate. As Chan (2006:92) observes, in discussing the nature of the Lord's Supper as communion with God and each other, "this sharing reverberates in our sharing with one another. This is why failure to share at the Lord's Table elicited a strong rebuke from the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 11)."

What is the solution Paul presses upon them? They must no longer eat and drink of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (v. 27) but instead examine themselves to make sure they have a right view of Christ, his church, and the Lord's Supper (vv. 28–29). And they must come together and eat the Supper together in unity—"you should all eat together" (v. 33)—to be the church Christ died and rose for them to become.

To conclude this section: Fellowship meals between church members, therefore, can become a warm way of mutual care for members of the church, but only when they are done in ways that reflect the Lord and his love for his people. If done in ways that dishonour Christ, they divide the body and humiliate fellow members. "They do more harm than good" (1 Cor 11:17). Yet when they take on the flavour of Acts 2:46—"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts"—then meals can build unity, demonstrate mutual care, and testify to others about the reality of Christ and his Spirit in the life of the church.

4.2.3 Sharing Material Possessions

Before we explore this ministry of mutual care involving sharing of possessions and other similar ones to follow, we need to examine a foundational passage that is frequently cited in many discussions about what is the proper duty of the church concerning social ministries and benevolence toward those in need. Many voices frequently cite Matthew 25 in these discussions.

In Matthew 25:31–46, the conclusion of Jesus's Olivet Discourse, we read his description of final judgment on the sheep and on the goats. After gathering all the nations, the Son of Man will separate the sheep from the goats (vv. 31–33):

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

In the end, the sheep will be blessed by the Father and receive eternal life; the goats will be cursed and receive eternal punishment (25:46).

On what basis will God make this judgment? The answer in the passage seems clear: A person's eternal destiny depends on the presence (by the sheep) or the absence (by the goats) of practical, loving care for Jesus himself, as that care has been demonstrated toward those whom Jesus describes as "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine" (vv. 40, 45).

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (vv. 34–40)

In verses 41–45 Jesus says the opposite about those he declares to be goats because they failed to care for Jesus's suffering brothers and sisters.

Who are these "least of these"? Carson (2010:582–584) discusses the various positions that Matthean scholars have taken. The first view understands these people to be any person who is hungry, thirsty, etc., and that the basis for entrance into eternal life will be the compassion shown to them. In this view, notes Carson, "All will ultimately be judged by their response to human need," and those who will enter the kingdom will include anyone—disciple of Jesus or not—who cares for others in distress whether the one in distress is a Christian or not. "The weakness of this general position," Carson observes, "is the identification of the least of Jesus's brothers with the poor and needy without distinction. There is no parallel for this, but there are one or two excellent alternative interpretations with strong NT parallels."

A second view understands the "least of these" in the opposite extreme, viewing them as Jesus's "apostles and other Christian missionaries." In light of passages like Matthew 10:40–42, those who receive Christ's apostles receive him and the treatment of his apostles determines the fate of all people. Those who receive them receive Christ; those who reject them reject Christ. Carson observes, "This interpretation is much closer to the text than the first one. The only hesitation concerns the restriction to apostles and missionaries in any technical sense. . . . Matthew's report of Jesus's words makes it clear that all true disciples are his emissaries."

A third view—Carson’s position—views “the least of these brothers and sisters” as Jesus’s disciples, not just any person in need (contra the first view) yet not to be restricted only to the apostles or specially-called missionaries (contra the second view). Carson writes,

The fate of the nations will be determined by how they respond to Jesus’ followers, who, “missionaries” or not, are charged with spreading the gospel and do so in the face of hunger, thirst, illness, and imprisonment. Good deeds done to Jesus’ followers, even the least of them, are not only works of compassion and morality but reflect where people stand in relation to the kingdom and to Jesus himself. Jesus identifies himself with the fate of his followers and makes compassion for them equivalent to compassion for himself.

Carson (2010:584) closes his summary by noting that Jesus identifying with “the least of these brothers and sisters of mine” is “entirely in line with the way the resurrected Jesus tied himself to his persecuted church when he confronted the church’s arch-persecutor, Saul, on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:4).” In that passage, to persecute Christians is to persecute Jesus himself.

This third view best fits the specific way Matthew records Jesus’s use of *adelphoi* in contexts beyond biological sibling relationships. As we saw in chapter two, Jesus said that his followers are brothers and sisters with each other (Matthew 5:22–23; 7:3–5; 18:15–18, 21–35; 23:8–9; Mark 10:29–31; Luke 22:31–32) and brothers and sisters to him (Matthew 12:46–50; 28:9–10; John 20:17). Contrary to the other views, Jesus does not expand his use “brothers and sisters” to refer to his Jewish hearers in general or to all humanity, nor does he limit it to his specially-chosen band of earthly followers. Morris (1992:639), Nolland (2005:1031–1032), Turner (2008:605), and Osborne (2010:937) agree with this position and each draws parallels with the way Jesus encourages people to treat his “little ones” (another term for his followers, in Matt 10:42 and 18:6, 10, 14). At the same time, each of these writers clearly states that this interpretation does not justify insensitivity toward those outside the church who are in need. It is merely their exegetical attempt as Matthean commentators to explain what Jesus meant by “these brothers and sisters of mine.”

For the purposes of our thesis, we see that Jesus provided the early church with an explicit warrant to show special care to fellow believers in distress. His examples are comprehensive and foundational, although likely not intended to be exhaustive of every possible situation of human physical distress (e.g., victims of assault or natural disasters). Jesus highlights six categories and the provision that the sheep unknowingly gave to him by caring in specific ways for his brothers and sisters:

- Hungry → You gave me something to eat, vv. 35, 37, 42, 44
- Thirsty → You gave me something to drink, vv. 35, 37, 42, 44
- Stranger → You invited me in, vv. 35, 38, 43, 44,
- Needed clothes → You clothed me, vv. 36, 38, 43, 44
- Sick → You looked after me, vv. 36, 39 (visit me), 43, 44
- In prison → You came to visit me, vv. 36, 39, 43 (look after me), 44

Based on this passage and other New Testament texts, we will consider the mutual care ministries of providing material possessions (here), providing hospitality (4.2.4), caring for widows and orphans (4.2.5), and visiting imprisoned members (4.2.6).

Turning to the book of Acts, the initial summary passage of the church's life together in Acts 2:42–47 pictures a united, generous, and sacrificial kind of mutual care for those in financial need. Verses 44–45 record the scene,

All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

While members retained personal ownership of their possessions, they did not keep their possessions private but were willing to sell items and give proceeds to those in the body who had need. In Acts 4:32–35 we see the spirit of generosity continuing.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Luke attributes this one-another care to the power of the God's grace. Schnabel (2012:*en.loc.*) connects this directly to the work of God's Spirit: "The community of followers of Jesus in Jerusalem is described not as an ideal, but as a reality. The willingness to regard one's own possessions as being at the disposal of the community if needy members needed help is the result of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit." In this case, the members sold possessions but brought the proceeds to the apostles' feet who apparently distributed the needed funds. Peterson (2009:205) explains that putting it at the apostles' feet "suggests some formal transfer to a common fund, administered by the apostles for the benefit of the needy." In Acts 6, as we will see below, the apostles delegated at least one aspect of the administration of benevolence—the distribution of food to the widows—to other members approved by

the church. Perhaps as the church grew so did the division of labour among the apostles and church members (Bock 2007:214).

Acts 4:36–37 then introduces a case example of generosity—Joseph (“Barnabas”)—who did what verses 34–35 described: “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.”

Again, we must note that the members retained personal ownership—the early church did not practice communism—of their possessions but used those possessions to care for one another. They viewed their possessions not as “private” property to retain at all costs but as expendable property to use to help each other (2:45; 4:32). There is also no need to assume that *all* members sold possessions or that those who did so sold *all* of their possessions to contribute to communal needs (Schnabel 2012:*en.loc.*).

We can observe several insights about these passages. First, their generous giving arose from their union with and their relationship to Christ. They were devoted to apostolic teaching (2:42), were part of a growth that Christ was bringing about (2:47); and the scenes involved bold preaching of Christ’s resurrection and active workings of God’s grace in their lives (4:33–34). Second, their generous giving sprang from their unity but also demonstrated and reinforced their unity. They were together and everything in common (2:44) and they were “one in heart and mind” (4:32). Thirdly, their generous giving met actual, concrete financial needs of their fellow members. They gave to those in need (2:45) in such a way that there were no needy people among them (4:34).

The New Testament epistles repeat these emphases. In Romans 12:13, the apostle Paul calls readers to “share with the Lord’s people who are in need.” Again, we see the concern expressed for those within the church body in need. Underscoring the importance of one-another financial care, Schreiner (1998:666) writes, “Paul certainly believed that all those in financial distress should be provided with help, but he assigned priority to those in the believing community (Gal. 6:10), in the same way that one should financially assist family members before giving to others (1 Tim. 5:4, 8).”

Paul urges the Galatian believers in Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” The good here in this context likely refers to material provisions in light of the previous context in verse 6, “Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor.” We also see in this passage that

believers are to give higher priority (“especially,” *malista*) to providing for the material needs of fellow church members than to the needs in the society as a whole.

This raises a question: Why does Paul give priority to providing “especially” for the material needs of fellow believers? Dunn (1993:332), followed by Moo (2013: 389), suggests a pragmatic reason: “The more general obligation comes to practical daily expression in the ‘love of neighbour’, not as a narrowing of the general obligation, but as the most immediate way of giving it effect.” The proximity of members to members would make it most immediately possible to do good to people. Bruce (1982:266) argues that the principle transcends the local church (which would nullify Dunn’s explanation for Paul’s priority) and sees the Jerusalem relief fund as a possible example of this, although he admits that “it is outrunning the evidence” to assume that Paul has that in mind here. Longenecker (1998:283) finds parallel support in Jesus’s command to his disciples to “love one another” in John 13:34–35. Fung (1988:299) proposes that the priority might have been related to the “actual historical situation: Christians in financial difficulties could hardly expect assistance from their pagan friends, because they had departed from the religious traditions of their neighbors, but their pagan friends would, however, expect Christians to help one another.” Schreiner (2010: 370) believes that because Paul was conscious of the church’s limited resources and its inability to meet all needs, he established this hierarchical priority of providing for fellow believers.

Similarly, the unnamed writer of the epistle to the Hebrews urges his readers, “do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb 13:16). Most commentators understand that “doing good and sharing” refer to or include material provisions (Lane 1998:552; Ellingworth 1993:721–722; O’Brien 2010:528; Cockerill 2012:706–707). No small part of a believer’s New Testament priesthood is caring for one another materially as a way to worship God and bring him pleasure.

Both James and John stress mutual financial care not only to encourage their readers to love each other sacrificially (a sufficient end in itself) but also to illustrate vital aspects of true Christian living. James 1:27 highlights the care for suffering widows and orphans as an evidence of true religion and obedience, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (a text to which we will return in section 4.2.5). James 2:14–17 also makes mutual financial care a mark of true saving faith,

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (Jas 2:14–17)

In 1 John 3:16–18 the apostle John likewise makes physical care a sign of sacrificial, Christlike love for one another,

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

With the possible exception of James 1:27 and the broader community (“all people”) mentioned in Galatians 6:10 as a secondary priority, all of these epistle passages call believers to care financially for one another even more so than for the society at-large.⁵¹

Furthermore, we observe that Paul not only urged believers to care for those within their local church (citywide or house church) but also for other Christians outside their locality. Paul announced to the Gentile churches the need to collect funds to give to the Jerusalem church members in need due to a Palestinian famine (Rom 15:22–33; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:8, 13–15; 9:1, 6, 7, 12–14). In this case, it is not merely a matter of Christians helping Christians but that of Gentile Christians helping Jewish Christians, showing forth the reality of the “one new person” (Eph 2:14–18)—the church—that Jesus has formed by his death and resurrection.

Comparing these epistolary commands with what we saw in Acts 2 and 4, we see three themes recur. First, the writers call their readers to minister financially to each other in light of the gospel—be it the self-giving poverty of Jesus in his incarnation (2 Cor 8:9) or his self-sacrificial death in 1 John 3:16. Their giving should be God-centred, as a sacrifice to please him (Heb 13:6). Second, the call to give to each other arises from and displays the unity of the church, just as we saw the command in Romans 12:13 arise from the one body picture earlier in the chapter. Third, the apostolic commands call believers to minister to those within their church family who are truly in need (Jas 2:14–

⁵¹ On this point of believers prioritizing one-another communal care, Badcock (2009:159) intriguingly asks what would happen if the church sought simply to “be a just society in itself, in order to bear witness to the state concerning the nature of true community. . . . Could such a demonstration of the way Christians ‘love one another’ be, in the end, a more effective witness to the world of the love of God than the attempt to directly influence policy in the political order?”

17; 1 John 3:16–18). The examples in Acts and the commands in the epistles flesh out the picture of generosity in Ephesians 4:28, “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”

4.2.4 Providing Hospitality

In several places, the New Testament commands believers to practice hospitality.⁵² What is hospitality? To show hospitality in the Ancient Near East was

to entertain or receive a stranger (sojourner) into one’s home as an honoured guest and to provide the guest with food, shelter, and protection. This was not merely an oriental custom or good manners but a sacred duty that everyone was expected to observe. Only the depraved would violate this obligation. Hospitality probably grew out of the needs of nomadic life. Since public inns were rare, a traveller had to depend on the kindness of others and had a right to expect it. This practice was extended to every sojourner, even a runaway slave (Deut. 23:15–16) or one’s archenemy. (Ngan 2003:786)

Another writer adds,

It is useful to limit the meaning of “hospitality” to benevolence done to those outside one’s normal circle of friends, as is implied in the literal meaning of the Greek word (“love of strangers”). Although the concept is thoroughly endorsed in the Bible, it is clearly found in nonbiblical cultures as well, especially the nomadic, where definite obligations to provide food, shelter, and protection are recognized. (Huttar 1988:1006)

At the same time, the obligatory nature of hospitality among the Hebraic people did not mark the Greco-Roman world. “In contrast to Hellenistic practices which associated hospitality with benefit and reciprocity, Christian commitments pressed hospitality outward toward the weakest, those least likely to be able to reciprocate” (Pohl 1999:17).

Hospitality involved provision of food and lodging. “Shared meals were significant because they represented common life and equality” (Pohl 2000:562–563). As we saw in Acts 2:42–47, breaking bread together in their homes created unity for the members. Sometimes hospitality involved protection or even providing asylum. Christians were called to do it not just as a cultural expectation but also as an expression

⁵² For an additional brief summary on biblical hospitality, see the excursus in Colin G. Kruse (2012:478–479), “Additional Note: Hospitality.” For works on hospitality in New Testament times, see Pohl (2000) above; Arthur Sutherland, *I Was A Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006); John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001); and Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2007).

of true love (Heb 13:1–2; 1 Pet 4:9; Rom 12:9–13), the kind of love Christ himself manifested toward them.

The New Testament call to extend hospitality to strangers is evident in perhaps the most famous hospitality passage in the Bible, Hebrews 13:1–2,

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

The writer sees the specific act of hospitality in verse 2 (and caring for prisoners in verse 3, see below) as an extension of the general call to love one another. Here the focus is on showing hospitality to strangers, with the story of Genesis 18 and Abram’s three angelic visitors likely in the background of verse 2b.

Aside from qualifications for elders and overseers in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8), the term appears in two other places in the epistles. In Romans 12:13, Paul tells the readers to “share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” Commenting on Paul’s verb *diōkontes* (which the NIV translates as “practice”), Moo (1996:780) writes,

The need to give shelter and food to visitors was great in the NT world, there being few hotels or motels. And the need among Christians was exacerbated by the many traveling missionaries and other Christian workers. Hence, the NT frequently urges Christians to offer hospitality to others (see 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9). But Paul does more than that here; he urges us to ‘pursue’ it—to go out of our way to welcome and provide for travelers.

Schreiner (1998:666–667) concurs, “The use of the participle *διώκοντες* (*diōkontes*, pursue) indicates the taking of initiative in providing hospitality. This would be particularly necessary in Paul’s day, for believers who traveled would typically lack the financial wherewithal to pay their own lodging, and thus their ministry or visit would depend on hospitality.” Dunn (1998:744) agrees, “The demand on the ethnic subgroups in Rome in this connection would probably be considerable, hence perhaps the need to press the obligation on his readers (*διώκω*—‘pursue, strive for, seek after, aspire to’); cf. 1 Pet 4:9.”

In addition, in 1 Peter 4:8–9, the apostle writes, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” We will return to these verses below.

To whom were Christians to demonstrate hospitality? The standard answer is that Christians were to show hospitality toward traveling Christians, including apostles,

evangelists, missionaries, etc. With the exception of false teachers (2 John 10), church members should receive traveling ministers of the gospel. In 3 John 5–8, the apostle commends Gaius for this,

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers and sisters, even though they are strangers to you. ⁶They have told the church about your love. Please send them on their way in a manner that honours God. ⁷It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. ⁸We ought therefore to show hospitality to such people so that we may work together for the truth.

Selman (1996:485) summarizes the conclusions of others as well when he writes that in hospitality

A special responsibility towards God’s servants is also evident, and Jesus’ earthly ministry (Mk. 1:29ff.; 2:15ff.; Lk. 7:36ff.; 10:38–41) and the apostles’ missionary labours (Acts 10:6ff.; 16:15; 17:7) were greatly dependent on the hospitality they received. The NT develops this by regarding the giving or refusing of hospitality to Jesus and his followers as an indication of one’s acceptance or rejection of the gospel (Mt. 10:9; Lk. 10:4), even at the final judgment (Mt. 25:34–46).

Yet this raises a question. Are strangers, outsiders, and traveling ministers the only proper recipients of Christian hospitality by church members? What about the call to pursue hospitality in relationship to the Lord’s people in Romans 12:13 and to “one another” in 1 Peter 4:8–9? Commenting on 1 Peter 4:9, Jobes (2005:280–281) challenges the prevailing perspective that limits the practice of Christian hospitality to those who are outsiders or who are travellers. She begins by stating the traditional view:

Most commentators construe hospitality at the time Peter wrote to mean that Christians are to welcome fellow believers into their homes as overnight guests. Because suitable inns were few and far between in the first century, this form of hospitality was no doubt both a practical necessity and a mutual courtesy. And since Peter is addressing believers scattered all over Asia Minor, they probably have opportunity to assist traveling Christians from other towns and provinces in this way, especially perhaps the courier who will carry Peter’s letter.

All would agree with this summary. However, is that all that the one-another hospitality commands say? Are we limited to the above? Jobes (2005:280) continues,

However, there is nothing in the immediate context to suggest that such hospitality specifically focuses on hosting overnight guests. In fact, the repetition of the reciprocal expressions in 4:8, “for one another” (εἰς ἑαυτούς, *eis heautous*); 4:9, “to one another” (εἰς ἀλλήλους, *eis allēlous*); and 4:10, “serve one another” (*eis heautous*), suggests a hospitality that functions within and among the local community of believers.

What might that look like? Jobes (2005:280–281) answers,

If so, Peter may be expecting his readers to open their homes for the purpose of Christian worship and fellowship, since at that time the local church had to meet in the homes of its members. This form of hospitality could be quite costly if it marked the family as a target for anti-Christian persecution. Furthermore, to welcome all Christian believers into one's home without grumbling requires one to maintain a certain openheartedness toward all. The exercise of love that Peter says is above all would be necessary if the local church was to have a place for all believers to gather together.

While most commentators hold the more limited, traditional, "traveling Christians" approach, Marshall (1991:en.loc.) presents a broader perspective that,

The first Christian congregations had no church buildings of the kind that are now considered essential by most Christian groups (so much so that the word "church" makes us think first of all of a building rather than of people). They met in the homes of the members or hired buildings used for other purposes. Church meetings, therefore, were impossible without willingness to entertain the church. If the center of the church meeting, or at least a frequent feature of it, was a meal, the burden of hospitality extended beyond simply providing a room, even though people will generally have brought their own provisions or contributions to the common stock with them.

The view of Jobes and Marshall that sees hospitality as encompassing not only outsiders and traveling Christians but also fellow church members best fits the "one another" language, at least in 1 Peter 4:8–11, if not also in Romans 12:9–13. Moreover, it reflects an understanding of the nature of the household and citywide churches that we saw in chapter two, namely, that the church met in homes. It certainly explains well the temptation to grumble in 1 Peter 4:9.

We close this section with Jobes's (2005:281) Christ-centred vision for hospitality as a ministry of mutual Christian care, a powerful expression of our thesis:

It is this quality of openheartedness toward one another that is the basis for a Christian hospitality willing to minister to other believers even in the absence of warm feelings and even when relationships are strained. Moreover, such openheartedness toward fellow believers would allow the opportunity for hospitality beyond the official meetings of the church. If their pagan friends and even their own families are ostracizing Christians, those distressed believers are to find a warm welcome in the homes of other members of the Christian community. The church is to be that alternate society where Christians find a place when shunned by unbelievers who live by different values. In a hostile world, the church is to be a place of safety and well-being for its members, a place where common beliefs unite more than differences divide. The Christian community is a colony of the holy nation of God among the nations of the world.

4.2.5 Caring for Widows and Orphans

As we approach this category, we will begin with James 1:27, which addresses the care of widows and orphans (see below for the terminology of “orphans” versus “the fatherless”) together, and then consider some passages that specifically address widow care.

Aside from a few metaphorical uses, the only New Testament passage that refers to orphans is James 1:27, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Why does James include widow-care and orphan-care as a significant aspect of true religion? The preceding context helps us, since in James 1:22–25 the apostle stresses the importance of being doers of God’s Word, not merely hearers. When we turn to the Hebrew Scriptures, we see God’s repeated concern to protect and care for widows and the fatherless (see below discussion on the terminology of “orphans” versus “the fatherless”). We can categorize the many passages in four ways:⁵³

- (1) Commands to Israel (Deut 14:27–28; 24:17–22; 26:12–13; Ps 82:3–4; Isa 1:17; Jer 22:3; Zech 7:10).
- (2) Commands to Israel, with warnings (Exod 22:22–24; Deut 27:19; Prov 23:10–11).
- (3) Rebukes for Israel’s failure (Psa 94:6; Isa 1:23; 10:1–2; Jer 5:28; Ezek 22:7; Mal 3:5).
- (4) Promises to or for widows and fatherless, including descriptions of God’s caring disposition (Deut 10:18; 16:11, 14; Pss 10:14, 17–18; 68:5–6; 146:9; Isa 54:5; Jer 49:10–11; Hos 14:1–3; cf. God’s special care for Hagar in Gen 16:6–16; 21:8–21; 25:12–18; and Job’s declaration in Job 29:16; 31:17–18).

The number of passages could easily explain why the rabbis taught that “those who looked after orphans will enter ‘into the gates of the Lord’” (Adamson 1976:86).

In other words, for James to address a topic so rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, we need not posit an exceptionally large number of widows and orphans in the church to whom James wrote or even in the surrounding community. We can assume the problem existed but we do not know the statistics (Moo 2000:96). We also know that other classes of people who might have been materially disadvantaged in Israel’s

⁵³ See Robert D. Jones, *Single Parents: God’s Grace for the Hardest Job* (New Growth Press, 2008) for a brief, practical presentation of these truths.

history, e.g., foreigners and Levites (Davids 1982:103), as well as in James's day.⁵⁴ Moreover, James himself addresses issues of poverty and social inequality in and around the church in 2:1–13 and 5:1–6. James might be using the categories of widow and orphan as representatives of all who are socially powerless or at risk (Keener 1993:*en.loc*; Blomberg & Kamell 2008:94). Yet none of these observations detracts from the central place that caring for widows and orphans occupied in the Mosaic Law and the Prophets, to which James calls his readers to observe. Verse 27 powerfully challenges those who merely hear but do not do God's Word in 1:22–25.

We do not know the exact status of the "orphans" here. Scot McKnight (2011:170) reports on recent research into papyri that shows that those described as "orphans" in Scripture were not necessarily parent-less. They might merely be father-less (or mother-less). In other words, if deceased man left behind his spouse and a child, the culture might call the child an "orphan." James also does not tell us whether these widows and orphans were part of the church body or part of the broader community of unbelievers. New Testament writers tend to prioritize mutual care of members for one another over against caring for outsiders (Gal 6:10; Matt 25:31–46; see discussions above), so we presume James would apply the same priority here, especially in view of Paul's counsel about Christian widows in 1 Timothy 5.

What is the distress (*thlipsis*) that widows and orphans suffered? While some writers suggest the term might anticipate the eschatological woes related to Christ's return (Martin 1998:53; Laws 1980:89–90), there is no reason within the immediate context of James 1:22–27 to assume this. The theme of obedience and James's genre style of wisdom literature would argue against this section being about an eschatological crisis. Furthermore, the plethora of references to caring for "widows and orphans" throughout the Hebrew Scriptures would certainly argue against this interpretation. Both McCartney (2009:129) and McKnight (2011:167–171) interact with this view and dismiss it.

Instead, the majority of writers understand the distress here as personal and social (e.g., Moo 2000:97; and others cited herein). Greenlee (2008:63) summarizes the categories that various writers suggest:

- Bereavement
- Poverty, including lack of social welfare and lack of money-making possibilities for widows

⁵⁴ Applying this to our day, Moo (2000:97) adds, "immigrants trying to adjust to a new life, impoverished third-world dwellers, the handicapped, or the homeless."

- Lack of legal status that left them in danger of exploitation
- Old age or illness for the widow

This is an important distinction. There is no reason to assume that widows who have adjusted well to their bereavement, who have financial stability, who enjoy health, and who live under a government with legal protection need to be the object of special ministry concern. Furthermore, as we will see below, if they are younger widows, Paul recommends that they remarry. Yet stability was not the norm for most widows in James's day. As Craig Keener (1993:*en.loc.*) notes,

Orphans and widows had neither direct means of support nor automatic legal defenders in that society. In Judaism, charity distributors made sure that widows and orphans were cared for if they had no relatives to help them; such charity is also part of the visiting envisioned here. Greek society did look out for freeborn orphans, but not other ones. Jewish people visited the bereaved especially during the first week of their bereavement but also afterward, and they likewise visited the sick. Many Greco-Roman writers also valued visiting the sick and bereaved).

What does it mean to look after (*episkeptomai*) widows and orphans? The verb appears eleven times in the New Testament, with a wide range of meanings (Arndt, Danker, Bauer 2000:378): (1) to “look at” or “examine” (Acts 6:3), (2) “to exercise oversight in behalf of” or “make an appearance to help” (Luke 1:68, 78; 7:16; Acts 15:14; Heb 2:6—all involving God's redemptive or beneficent actions), and, related somewhat to this second category, (3) to “visit” in the sense of “go to see a person with helpful intent” (Matt 25:36, 43; Acts 7:23; 15:36), with James 1:27 listed in this last category. In terms of verse 27, Greenlee (2008:62) notes that it implies visiting someone with the purpose of caring for their needs and includes personal involvement. Concurring with Arndt *et. al.* above, McCartney (2009:128) observes, “It is the motive of helpful intent, the objective of giving aid, or undertaking to look out for the interests of someone that is operative here. Given James's concern that people do things for the needy rather than just say things to them (2:16), it is unlikely that James has only visitation or an intellectual interest in mind here” (also Laws 1980:89).

Based on this understanding, in our day, placement into a well-managed orphanage or into the home of a qualified adopting family could express “looking after” a parent-less (not merely father-less, per above) orphan.

Flowing from the unity and sharing of possessions we saw in Acts 4:32–37, the church in Jerusalem established a plan for the distribution of food to the widows among them. Yet in Acts 6:1, amid the growth that the church was experiencing, a major

conflict developed. “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” The issue was not a lack of food but a perceived inequity of distribution for all the widows. The problem needed resolution; the proper care of these widows was a high and indispensable priority. The apostles apparently had overseen this ministry (v. 3; 4:35) but now that it needed more attention, they devised a plan for delegation (vv. 2–4). The members approved, the plan went forward, and the church continued to grow (vv. 5–7).

In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, Paul gives extended counsel to Timothy about the proper care for widows at the church of Ephesus, and he expects Timothy to convey these instructions (v. 7).⁵⁵ For Paul, this must be a priority for Timothy and the church. The specific concern is for the care of widows who need some form of financial provision. In verse 3 he instructs Timothy to care for widows who need it. The NIV’s “give proper recognition” translates the verb *timaō* that often includes providing material support, especially in the Pastoral Epistles (as in the next passage, 5:17–19).

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Paul stresses again in verse 5, as he said in verse 3, that widow must truly be in need. Yet there are three exceptions to the church’s responsibility. First, if the widow has children or grandchildren (vv. 4, 8), or another Christian woman already caring for her (v. 16), these extended family members or Christian sisters should provide for her.

Second, the church should not provide for an immoral widow (v. 6). The provision concerns only godly widows who continue to manifest godliness (v. 5). Verses 9–10 raise some knotty questions. “No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord’s people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

⁵⁵ For further study on 1 Timothy 5:3–16 and its application to financial care for widows, see Allison (2012:454–458).

What is this “list of widows” in verse 9? Guthrie (1990:116–117) explains the issues involved

Whether there was at this time a distinct order of widows performing functions among women members, comparable to those of the elders, is a much-disputed question (cf. comment on 3:11). . . . The proviso of so high an age as sixty presents a difficulty as to whether *widow* should be understood in the same sense as in verses 3–8 (i.e. of genuinely destitute Christian widows) or in the sense of widows belonging to an order. In the former case, it is inconceivable that the church would set an arbitrary age in dispensing help to destitute widows, while in the latter case it is difficult to believe the entry age to an ecclesiastical order would be as high as sixty, in the contemporary world a relatively more advanced age than in our own. It seems preferable, therefore, to suppose that special duties in the church were reserved for some of the older widows receiving aid, and that some official recognition of this fact was given.

Guthrie’s (1990:117) conclusion seems wise: “It seems preferable, therefore, to suppose that special duties in the church were reserved for some of the older widows receiving aid, and that some official recognition of this fact was given.” The church should provide for all godly widows in need who meet the criteria in verses 5–8. Some of the older widows, however, should be identified and set apart in special ways to minister in the church. Paul specifies some godly criteria for them in verses 9–10.

The category of younger widows in verses 11–15 presents a third exception. They should not be placed on the financial support list but should be encouraged to marry.

As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

By these carefully delineated instructions to Timothy, Paul balances both the need to provide for widows who truly need support and the need to protect the church from being overburdened with improper duties of care that would distract members from their proper duties of care.

4.2.6 Visiting and Caring for Imprisoned Members

One of the less common but critical mutual care ministries we see in the New Testament is visiting fellow believers who have been imprisoned. Persecution

sometimes fell upon God's people, resulting in imprisonment and even physical death. John the Baptist was imprisoned for his commitment to righteousness (Matt 4:12; 11:2; 14:3, 10; Mark 1:14; 6:17, 27; Luke 3:20; John 3:24). In his earthly ministry Jesus predicted that his followers would suffer persecution and imprisonment (Luke 21:12). While the apostle Peter declared his willingness to suffer this way (Luke 22:33), his faith stumbled at Jesus's arrest and trials and he denied Jesus at the crucifixion. Yet afterward, restored by Jesus and empowered by the Spirit's endowment at Pentecost, Peter became a bold evangelist, and he suffered imprisonment and later release (Acts 12).

In Acts we also read of Saul of Tarsus's relentless persecution of believers, hauling them off to prison because of their allegiance to Jesus (Acts 8:3; 9:2, 21; 22:4, 5; 26:10). Ironically, after his conversion, he too was imprisoned for his faith (Acts 16:16–40; 20:23; 21–28). He recalls his imprisonments in 2 Corinthians 11:23 and he self-designates himself as “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:1), “a prisoner for the Lord” (Eph 4:1), “his prisoner” (2 Tim 1:8), and “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (Phlm 1). He also refers to his former fellow prisoners Andronicus and Junia (Rom 16:7) and his fellow prisoner Aristarchus (Col 4:10). In Revelation 2, the ascended Christ commends and then warns the church in Smyrna, “Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give your life as your victor's crown” (2:10).

Three passages of Scripture shed light on the mutual care ministry of believers visiting imprisoned brothers and sisters. In Matthew 25:31–46 above, we saw one New Testament basis for this one-another ministry (see vv. 36, 39, 43, 44). The two other places appear in Hebrews. In Hebrews 10:32–34 the writer alludes to various kinds of past suffering that some of the church members underwent, as well as the way the other members shared in their sufferings.

Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

These sufferings were both varied and severe. Verse 33 describes public shame and verbal insult, with the term “insult” (*oneidismois*) the same term used in 11:26 and

13:13 for the “disgrace” that Christ suffered outside the camp (O’Brien 2010:384–385). There was public persecution, suggesting acts of violence that attended the verbal abuse, although short of martyrdom at this point (12:4). O’Brien explains,

The violence these Christians had experienced was probably intended to pressure the members of the community into giving up their beliefs and to deter others from adopting them because of the threat of disgrace, while public displays of persecution would have indicated to the authorities how Christians were regarded by others, and thus increase the likelihood of arrest.

The exact situations apparently varied; the writer apparently summarizes numerous past incidents. Sometimes some of the readers themselves suffered these things (v.33a); sometimes they stood alongside of their suffering fellow members (v. 33b). The writer uses the term *koinōnoi* to describe their fellowship and partnership with one another amid that suffering.

Verse 34 then specifies two specific forms of punishment: imprisonment and confiscation of their property. While the current readers themselves might not have been imprisoned for their faith, they supported their imprisoned fellow believers by suffering with them. Based on the context we can assume that the imprisonments mentioned here were related to governmental opposition to their faith in Christ, not criminal activity (cf. 1 Pet 4:15). The verb “suffered with” (*sunepathēsate*) reminds readers of Christ’s own incarnational solidarity with them, since 4:15 uses the same verb to describe his empathetic love for them: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” As we saw in chapter three, we see another example of an indicative theme (Christ’s empathy toward believers) breeding an imperative action (believers empathizing with one another). Mutual Christian care always flows from God’s work in Jesus Christ.

In our passage, this verb carries the sense of emotional empathy along with the practical activities of “visiting them, feeding them, and undoubtedly actively seeking their release” (Lane 1998:300). O’Brien (2010:385) describes their prison ministry,

Their strong sense of community was clearly shown in their open identification with their brothers and sisters in serious need. In particular, their fellowship with others’ afflictions was expressed in compassion for prisoners, who were normally kept in chains. This signified active support and solidarity as well as empathy (v. 34; note 4:16), and no doubt included supplying food, water, and clothing, without which those in prison would have died.

Bruce (1990:270) provides a similar perspective, noting the risk the visitors incurred and linking their ministry to Christ's words above:

Those of them who had not been personally exposed to suffering showed their solidarity with those who were directly attacked, and so shared the public scorn. When some of their number were imprisoned, the others did not shrink from visiting them, although in this way they ran the risk of being imprisoned themselves. They thus secured a place for themselves among those to whom the Son of Man says: "I was in prison, and you came to me" (Matt. 25:36). Prisoners who had no means of their own were liable to starve unless their friends brought them food and whatever other form of help they required; throughout the whole age of imperial persecution of the church the visiting of their friends who were in prison was a regular, though dangerous, duty of Christian charity.

The confiscation of property in verse 34b could refer either to various official actions done by magistrates or to illegal seizures done amid mob violence (O'Brien 2010:385). The text does not tell us this, but based on the readers' response to their imprisoned members (v. 34a) we can safely infer that they rendered compassion and assistance to one another in either case. The chapter closes with the writer commending their eternal perspective on the loss of their material possessions (v. 34b; cf. 11:8–16, 24–28) and exhorting them to persevere in faith as they wait for their promised reward (vv. 35–39).

In Hebrews 13:3, the writer again refers to their ministry to imprisoned members, "Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." Apparently, the problem the writer recalled in 10:32–34 above has continued into the present.

The verb "remember" is timely since "prisoners are out of sight and apt to be forgotten" (Guthrie 1983:269). Yet the verb far exceeds any notion of merely recalling cognitive facts. Especially in the context of the call to love in verse 1 and to show hospitality in verse 2, remembering implies active care. "Their concern for the prisoners had been a hallmark of their previous behaviour, and the author commended them for this costly commitment (10:34). Now they are being urged to continue in this Christian responsibility" (O'Brien 2010:508; cf. France 2006:184). The text does not say what that active care should look like, but we can presume it would include the activities we noted in 10:32–34 above, e.g., visiting them, feeding them, and seeking their release. Cockerill (2012:681) explains,

They should minister to their brothers and sisters with the full sympathy of those who share their experience. The incarcerated endured great suffering because prisons were cramped, damp, dark, and filthy. Furthermore, those who kept them were often harsh and desirous of bribes. Prisoners were given no clothes and little if any food. Thus to "remember" such prisoners was to supply their

physical needs and provide them with moral support, even at the risk of exposing oneself to possible confinement.

Again, as 10:32–34 above, compassion and emotional solidarity should mark this prison ministry—“as if you were together with them in prison.” Moreover, the members should show the same mutual care not just to those who suffer the specific injustice of imprisonment but to any fellow member who experiences any form of mistreatment (cf. 11:25, 37) due to their faith. The same sense of one-another identification should again be present—“as if you yourselves were suffering.” Both parts of verse 3 recall the empathetic attitudes we saw above in Paul:

- Romans 12:15, Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
- 1 Corinthians 12:26, If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

As Bruce (1990:372) so concisely states, true love involves “a capacity for putting oneself in another’s place and exercising imaginative sympathy. This same imaginative sympathy should be extended to all who are ill-treated.”

4.3 Proper Words of Mutual Care

In this section, we will consider various ways members minister to one another with their words. As we have done throughout this thesis, our focus is on the mutual ministry of members, not pastors or church leaders. While the goals of these one-another communications include edification, an aspect of wholistic mutual care, they also involve support, encouragement, and comfort. These actions are particularly noteworthy in light of the suffering that the early church experienced in the midst of economic problems and civil and religious opposition. We will look at six forms of communication.

4.3.1 Teaching and Instructing Each Other

Let Erickson (1998:1064–1065) set the stage for this group of related one-another commands:

The church also edifies its members through instruction or teaching. This is part of the broad task of discipling. One of Jesus’ commands in the Great Commission was to teach converts “to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). To this end, one of God’s gifts to the churches is “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11) to prepare and equip the people of God for service. The instruction need not always be given by the official pastor-teacher of a congregation, however, nor need it be given within a large group.

Per Erickson's last sentence, we will survey various passages in which the teachers of God's Word are the members of the church, not the official pastors or teachers, and the teaching apparently is not in a large group setting.

Before looking at several New Testament passages, it will be helpful to sample some specialized works on ecclesiology written by evangelical theologians. We find various degrees of mention of the role of members in teaching one another. Clowney (1995:141), argues that every Christian has a ministry role but he seemingly limits the teaching ministry to those officers specially given by Christ to the church (Eph 4:11–12). Although he refers to Colossians 3:16 in the context of worship singing (135–136) and he mentions that believers in their general office can minister God's Word in their daily calling (208), Clowney does not explain what these daily ministries look like. In *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (2009:164–166) Brad Harper and Paul Metzger speak of the church's ministries as “means of redemptive community,” including the church's teaching ministry, but they do not refer to the passages below or describe teaching by non-officers, apart from formal “adult education” classes. While Allison (2012:433–438) discusses the proclamation of God's Word as one of the church's six functions or ministries, his overwhelming emphasis is on preaching, with one final sentence stating that “the church should provide many other venues—e.g., Sunday school classes, community/small groups, one-on-one discipleship—for communicating this Word.” Thankfully, he comments further on some of these activities in subsequent sections under different headings. Hammett (2005:227–232), presents a balanced emphasis in his section on the ministry of the Word, one of five church ministries. Along with preaching, he talks about various kinds of small groups, Bible studies and specialized classes, as well as individual teaching and mentoring. However, like the other writers above, he makes little reference to the passages we will consider.

We begin with Colossians 3:16, a passage that envisions the members of the church communicating the Gospel to each other in both speech and song:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Our interests here⁵⁶ lie in the pair of verbs, “teach” (*didaskō*) and “admonish” (*noutheteō*), enjoined on the church as a whole. Nothing suggests these tasks should be limited to the Colossian leaders; indeed, there are no references to the leaders here or anywhere in the Colossian letter.

Before considering their meaning, it is instructive to note that Paul uses these same two verbs earlier in the same letter to summarize his gospel ministry. In Colossians 1:28 he tells the church, “[Christ] is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.” This implies that the one-another ministry of “teaching” and “admonishing” the he enjoins on his readers in 3:16 is an extension of Paul’s own admonishing and teaching ministry in 1:28. (The reversal of the word order of the two verbs seems insignificant and merely stylistic.) Here we find an apostolic succession not of office but of the gospel message, akin perhaps to the charge given to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2 (although that text likely envisions training of official teachers, not of every member). In fact, the succession begins with Jesus himself who commissioned his apostles in Matthew 28:18–19 to make disciples and teach (*didaskō*). Colossians 3:16 completes the transmission from Jesus to the apostle Paul and then from the apostle Paul to the church members who will teach each other Christ’s words. Jesus teaches his apostles who in turn teach their churches who in turn teach each other.

What do these ministries entail? The verb “teach” (*didaskō*), a general word for instruction, is used in public and private contexts. In Acts 20:20, for example, Paul describes his teaching ministry in both venues, “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.” In other words, the Colossians 3:16 one-another teaching ministry could occur in one-on-one, informal interactions or even, as the context might suggest, in a corporate worship setting. What is central here (and in Paul’s ministry in the 1:28 parallel) is that the content of mutual teaching ministry is the Christian message (Peterson 1992:222). The NIV helpfully translates *ho logo tou Christou* as “the message of Christ,” meaning the gospel.

One of Paul’s most inviting pictures of mutual gospel teaching appears in Ephesians 4. In the opening section, Paul calls the church to pursue and practice unity

⁵⁶ For discussion on the rest of the text (“singing...”) see the standard commentaries, along with David G. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 197–198, 221–222.

(vv. 1–3), in light of their gospel calling (v. 1, with Eph 1–3, esp. 1:18). This unity is based on their positional oneness in Christ—note the sevenfold use of “one” in verses 4–6. Yet unity does not mean uniformity; there is diversity within the church. The risen, ascended Lord Jesus has given his people a variety of spiritual gifts (vv. 7–11), in this case, a variety of gifted people.

We turn now to examine Ephesians 4:11–16 in some detail.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The risen, ascended Lord Jesus gives to his church, among the other gift-people (recall our previous chapter), “pastors and teachers” with a specific role: to prepare the members for ministry. Paul does not tell us what the works of service include. The general language in verse 12 allows for various ministries, as does the closing metaphor in verse 16 where he envisions “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

There is, however, one specific ministry task highlighted amid the general language, illustrations, and metaphors: “speaking the truth in love” (*alētheuontes en agapē*). This participle form of the verb *alētheuō* is not easily translated into English, since English has no verb for “truthing.” For this reason, most English versions add the verbal notion of *speaking* the truth (O’Brien 1999:310), although a broader combined sense of “living out and speaking the truth” might better fit the context of 4:1–3 and 4:17ff.

What is the “truth” that Paul envisions each member living out and speaking to one another? On a popular level, this verse is sometimes quoted to motivate one Christian to confront another about the latter’s sin, but to do so in a kind, gentle way. (“Please pray for me. I need to go talk to Russell but I want to make sure that I ‘speak the truth in love.’”) The objection to this interpretation is twofold: It pits love versus truth and it assigns the meaning of confrontation to the term truth. In short, there is no contextual warrant for this understanding.

What does “truth” mean here? It means the gospel message. Verse 15 parallels verse 13, which refers to the “knowledge of the Son of God” that matures us. Moreover, the noun form of truth (*alētheia*) appears three times in Ephesians as a synonym for the gospel. In 1:13, Paul speaks of “the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.” In 4:20, he recalls the readers’ conversion, “when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.” Part of the armour of God that the Ephesians should don is the “the belt of truth buckled around your waist” (6:14). James also uses *alētheia* to mean the Christian message in James 5:19, referring to someone in the church who might “wander from the truth.” Furthermore, Paul uses the verbal form *alētheuō* in Galatians 4:16, “...have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”, referring to his gospel ministry. In short, here in Ephesians 4:15 Paul visualizes each member of the church proclaiming to each other the gospel—what God has done, is doing, and shall do for them and in them through Jesus Christ. Whatever else “every member ministry” might entail in the life of a local church, there is no warrant to reduce it to programs, committees, and service slots. Living out and sharing the gospel and its applications to one another lies at the heart of the Ephesians 4:11–16 church vision.

While not referencing this text, Dietrich Bonhoeffer captures this vision in his classic book on Christ-centred fellowship, *Life Together*. In a section discussing God’s gift of justification—God’s “alien righteousness” for believers—and the ongoing need Christians have to receive God’s external Word of grace from a source outside of themselves, Bonhoeffer (1954:22–23) writes, “Help must come from the outside, and it has come and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ, bringing redemption, righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” But how does this Word come to a believer? Bonhoeffer answers,

God has put this Word into the mouth of men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to Him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother, his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.

Amid the fears and doubts that one church member might have, there are brothers and sisters in his or her church family who can bring to this struggling member the all-

certain, assuring truth of the gospel. This then leads Bonhoeffer to the vision of church fellowship that movingly pictures Ephesians 4:15,

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As such, God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this “alien righteousness.”

Bonhoeffer captures the same intentionality that Paul conveys to his readers and wants the pastors and teachers to convey to their members in 4:11–16, namely, a church of members who self-consciously live out and speak gospel truths into each other’s lives to minister to each other.

As we conclude our look at Ephesians 4, we can observe that the twofold, ultimate goal for the provision of these gifted leaders is to enable the church to grow in greater maturity and unity (vv. 12–16). The mutual ministry that will achieve this outcome is clear: living out the gospel and speaking its truths and implication to each other. All this, of course, must be couched in love (*en agapē*, 4:2, 15, 16), the chief fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23; 1 Cor 13) as we saw in our previous chapter.

In Titus 2:4–5, the apostle envisions a specific ministry by older women to younger women. “Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.” Paul uses the verb *sōphronizō*, translated here in the NIV as “urge” and in other versions as “train” (NIV84, ESV), “encourage” (NASB95), or “admonish” (NKJV). As Ulrich Luck (1971:1104) notes, “In Titus 2:4 a worthy walk is demanded of older women ἵνα σωφρονίσωσιν τὰς νέας, i.e., that they spur on the younger women to a similar walk, which is then set forth in detail.” While we do not know the specific activities involved in training, the text addresses the desired outcome: both the qualities that should mark the younger women as well as the ultimate concern that no one malign God’s Word (cf. vv. 8, 10). The qualities are nothing extraordinary; they correspond with other descriptions of godly older women in the Pastoral Epistles. One observation to note is the need for older women to urge younger women to love their husbands and children. While we might assume that a younger married woman would have at least some measure of natural affection for her husband and children—in most cultures a mother’s love for her children is proverbial—we must assume that the need for urging in this passage goes deeper, to address the heart of what sacrificial, Christlike love entails.

To close this section, what we see in these passages is that the apostle Paul not only permits but also encourages church members, even non-pastors, to bring God's truth to one another to help one another growth in their Christian faith and maturity. We will see this further developed in complementary ways in our next section.

4.3.2 Admonishing and Encouraging Each Other

We begin this section by returning to Colossians 3:16, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." In addition to "teach," Paul uses another paired term, "admonish" (*noutheteō*). The word appears eleven times (eight times in its verbal form, three times in its nominal form) in the New Testament, all from the pen (or mouth, Acts 20:31) of the apostle Paul. In five of its uses, the context suggests a general sense of instruction (Rom 15:14; Eph 6:4; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Thess 5:12), although it being paired with *didaskō* here in Colossians 1:28 and 3:16 might imply a more admonitory nuance. For example, referring to both verses, Moo (2008:209) suggests, "'teaching' refers to the positive presentation of Christian truth, while 'admonishing' refers to the more negative warning about the danger of straying from the truth." On the other hand, Pao (2012:132) views the two terms more synonymously. In the other six uses of *noutheteō*, the context pictures a stronger sense of warning. Paul warns the Ephesian elders that false teachers will come from outside and from inside the church (Acts 20:31). He confronts the Corinthians and he warns them of the judgment he will bring to those who continue to have a dismissive attitude toward him (1 Cor 4:14). He also explains informs them how the stories of ancient Israel in the desert as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures serve to warn the Corinthians of the dangers of idolatry (1 Cor 10:11). In Titus 3:10 Paul tells Titus to how to warn a divisive person within the church. (We will consider the warnings in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3:15 below.)

Who are the ones who voice the admonitions? The verb refers to Paul's own ministry activity three times (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:4; Col 1:28), as well as to the exemplary purpose of the Hebrew Scriptures (1 Cor 10:11) and to specific duties of fathers (6:4), of Titus (Titus 3:10), and of church leaders (1 Thess 5:12). The four other uses involve member-to-member admonition (Rom 15:14; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Thess 3:15).

Before considering these last four uses, we need to recognize and not minimize the importance Paul assigns to mutual admonition. For example, Button and Van Rensburg (2003:19) rightly argue that house churches were led by qualified elders, not necessarily those with financial or social status, and these leaders had the role of exercising *noutheteō*. But in making this point, they seem to diminish the admonitory role of members: “The verb *νουθετέω* (admonish) is also applicable to the activity of believers in general (cf. Rom 15:14), but it is *particularly descriptive* of the work of elders/overseers” (emphasis added). However, do the eleven passages above actually suggest that mutual admonition is merely “applicable” and that admonition “particularly” belongs to the elders? The apostle instead assigns *noutheteō* equally to both members and leaders.

We can consider some examples of this member-to-member *nouthesia/noutheteō* ministry. In Romans 15:14, the apostle posits high praise for the believers in Rome: “I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct (*noutheteō*) one another.” Here the general sense of “instruct” seems sufficient since the immediate context requires nothing further, although we cannot rule out “admonish” in light of the admonitory tone in 14:1–15:7. Christian counselling author Jay Adams (1970:41–64) translates it as “counsel” and refers to his approach to biblical counselling as “nouthetic counselling”—using God’s Word, out of care and concern, to help people change by confronting their problems (although that depends on how one understands “counsel”).

Regardless of the precise nuance, we should reflect on Paul’s high view of the members’ qualifications and abilities to minister to one another. While Paul apparently had no firsthand, onsite contact with the Roman church and had yet to realize his desire to visit, he likely received reports of the church’s health through his co-workers (Moo 1996:18,887), so his threefold commendation of their goodness, knowledge, and ministry competency was not unfounded. At the same time, we must not assume that his confidence (“I am convinced . . .”) was tied to the church’s relative maturity. Since Paul could also highly commend a problem-filled church like Corinth (e.g., 1 Cor 1:4–9), perhaps his ultimate confidence lay in the nature of the church itself as God’s people and the working of God’s Spirit in all the churches. The apostle believed that church members not only *should* teach one another, but also *could* do so.

What about the admonitory sense of *noutheteō*? As one would expect, there are clear examples of the admonitory emphasis when the admonisher is, per above, an

apostle (Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 4:14); the Hebrew Scriptures (1 Cor 10:11), church leaders (1 Thess 5:12), or an apostolic representative like Titus (Titus 3:10). Yet there are also instances where Paul assigns to the members as a whole this duty to warn. While Colossians 3:16 above might carry this sense, the warning tone seems clearly warranted in the contexts of the two Thessalonian passages.

Having addressed the topic of the coming Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 and called the body to encourage each other (in 4:18 and 5:11), Paul exhorts the members in 5:12–13a to treat their leaders properly and in 5:13b to live peacefully with each other. With 5:14 the apostle begins another series of brief imperatives to the members (“brothers and sisters” again, as in verse 12) concerning their relationship with one another. While he referred to the leaders’ roles in verses 12–13 (including their own ministry of *noutheteō*), the command here in verse 14 to minister comes to the members, as virtually all commentators agree.⁵⁷ For example, Marshall (1994:1284) observes, “It is noteworthy that Paul here urges the church in general (note the repetition of *brothers* in v 14) and not just the leaders to care for the rest of the congregation.” Paul envisions mutual care. Green (2002:252) adds, “Although the leaders played an important role within the congregation (v. 12), the task of maintaining the well-being of the Christian community did not fall to them exclusively. The members of the church shared a mutual responsibility to help one another for their building up in the faith (cf. 5:11; Eph. 4:16).” And Fee (2009:209) concludes, “Thus, even though leaders will be expected to take the lead, these concerns are in fact, *as always in Paul*, matters in which the whole community is to be engaged” (emphasis added). For the same view, see also Ellingworth & Nida (1976: 118–119); Morris (1984:102); Best (1986:228–229); Stott (1994:122); Martin (1995:176–177); Bruce

⁵⁷ Gary Steven Shogren (2012:221), however, acknowledges that verses 12–13 address church members but suggests that in verse 14 “Paul is turning to address the leaders of the church.” Why does Shogren prefer this interpretation? “After all,” he states, “the verb ‘admonish’ (*νουθετέω*) in this section is a prerogative of leadership.” He cites the Chrysostom, although Chrysostom (1889:367) offers no rationale for the shift in addressees, merely a one-sentence comment, “Here Paul addresses those who have rule.” But Shogren begs the question and illustrates one of the concerns in our thesis, i.e., the way scholars can underestimate the role of church members in the New Testament church. While admonition certainly is “a prerogative of leadership” in the New Testament (as seen in the preceding verse 12), our passages above and 2 Thessalonians 3:15 below (as Shogren 2012:330 agrees), show us that it is also the duty of members and not the *sole* prerogative of leaders.

(1998:122); Beale (2003:163–164); Thomas (2006:429–430); and Calvin (2010:293–294).

What is the command? “And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” Paul refers to three types of people among them. There is no basis to assume that Paul posits a threefold, anthropological typology of people, i.e., three universal categories that divide humankind or a church’s membership. Rather, the apostle simply observes that there are different kinds of people and that each person needs to be handled differently.

In what ways should members minister to each other? Paul presents three corresponding strategies that are appropriate for each kind of person. He calls the members warn (*noutheteō*) those who are disorderly (ESV “idle,” NASB95 “unruly,” NIV “idle and disruptive”). The members must confront their sinning fellow members and call them to repent. However, disheartened or fainthearted members need to be encouraged or comforted (*parakaleō*), not admonished. Still others, notes Paul, are weak. They must be helped or upheld (*antecheō*). Not knowing the conditions of one’s fellow members, or using the wrong intervention strategy, will produce ineffective ministry. The apostle then adds a vital attitude that must mark each ministry method—patience (*makrothumia*), the fruit of God’s Spirit.

Again, we observe that the call to *noutheteō* ministry comes not to the leaders (whose ministries are assumed) but to the members. Mutual care must mark the members’ communal life.

Similarly, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15, Paul addresses a problem situation in the church. Some members were not obeying the apostle’s communal rule, one that he embodied by his own conduct among them: a person must work, and he must do so to eat. The church must not extend benevolence to able-bodied people. What should the community of believers do with such a disobedient member? Paul writes, “Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer” (3:14–15). Paul’s blend of firmness and kindness, boldness and care, immediately strikes us. On the one hand, the members must not overlook or excuse the person’s disobedience—here, his refusal to work. They must confront the person and take specific remedial actions. Yet in doing this, they must

not treat the offender as an enemy, but as their brother or sister. The church must neither condemn nor condone his behaviour but demonstrate a balanced, restorative ministry.

In two admonitory contexts, the unknown writer of the epistle to the Hebrews uses the verb *parakaleō* to charge the readers to mutually minister to one another. English versions vary between translating it as “encourage” or “exhort.” The semantic range of *parakaleō* allows for either emphasis. Most Greek grammarians argue that the verb’s essence lies in coming alongside of someone to help someone, with the specific shade of help defined by the context.

The call in Hebrews 3:12–14 is urgent and firm:

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.

The stakes here are high—the danger of members’ hearts becoming self-deceived and hardened by sin, and the members themselves apostatizing. What is the antidote? The mutual, ongoing *parakaleō* ministry of urging each other to follow Christ and hold firmly to him until the end. Here the sense of “exhort” or “admonish” seems preferred to “encourage,” given the severe warnings in the context, including the admonitory flavour of Psalm 95 that provides the backdrop for this Hebrews passage. As an important aside, again we note that the apostle does not summon the church leaders (although 13:7, 17 acknowledges their presence and role) but the membership as a whole. The Lord tasks leaders and members alike to keep watch over each member’s soul. Failure to do so may result in spiritually fatal consequences for the church.

The same writer sounds a more general note of mutual ministry in Hebrews 10:24–25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” The intensity of this directive is no less than in Hebrews 3 above—both require specific attention to the condition of one’s fellow members. Nor is the urgency less than Hebrews 3 above—both have in mind the final *eschaton*. But the first person plural cohortative verbs (“let us...”) and the proactive purpose of edification and increased ministry (“love and good deeds”), as opposed to the reactive thrust of preventing apostasy, suggest that “encourage” here best translates *parakaleō*.

We draw further insights about mutual care from this passage. The call to members to “consider”—to give deliberate attention to—how they may “spur one another on” (stir up, ESV; stimulate NASB95) to greater love and good works prepares us for the call to love in 13:1, “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.” It also encourages the practical ministries in 13:2–3, 16. The members should show hospitality to strangers (13:2), sympathetically remember those imprisoned and mistreated (13:3; also 10:32–34), and share with each other in financial need as part of their priestly sacrifices (13:16).

The passage further reminds us of the importance that Jesus’s apostle assigns to the members regularly assembling. Evidently, some were becoming slack in their church attendance and neglecting the one-another aspects that our thesis explores.⁵⁸

Finally, we will consider one more pair of verses, 1 Thessalonians 4:18 and 5:11, which capture the encouragement nuance of *parakaleō*.

- 1 Thessalonians 4:18, Therefore encourage one another with these words.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Both verses conclude eschatological sections (4:13–18 and 5:1–11) that are adjacent to one another and similar in theme. The first section, 4:13–18, addresses the question that had unsettled the readers, about the plight of their deceased fellow Christians in light of Christ’s imminent promised return (v. 13). Paul answers their questions with hope-giving eschatological truths that he applies to them (vv. 14–17) and then urges them to encourage each other with these comforting truths (v. 18). The second section, 5:1–11, addresses when this will occur and what signs might precede it (v. 1). Again, Paul answers their questions with hope-giving eschatological truths that he applies to them (vv. 2–10) and then urges them to encourage each other with these comforting truths (v. 18). Here in 5:18 Paul adds the ministry goal of building them up (*oikodomeō*) to his *parakaleō* agenda, reminding us (as we saw in chapter three concerning the goal of Spirit-ual gifts in the body) that mutual care involves encouraging, comforting, and

⁵⁸ On a personal note, in my experience in both evangelical and mainline congregations in the United States, some pastors fondly cite this passage to exhort their members to attend the church’s Sunday morning worship services, and Sunday evening services too in some cases. However, mere attendance at a formal service does not fulfil this command, for the command calls for intentionality in mutual ministry, not merely singing hymns, following along as others lead in prayer, giving financial offerings, and listening to a monologue sermon. While these components are biblically legitimate, they are insufficient to fulfil the one-another portrait presented here and throughout the New Testament.

building up one another. The mutual ministry pattern we see in this pair of Pauline verses (4:18 and 5:11)—for church members to encourage and edify each other—is to understand each other’s struggles and to bring timely, Christ-centred truths that will address those struggles. In this way, members bring to one another God’s truth in comforting ways. They serve as Christ’s instruments to fulfil the apostle’s prayer for them in his second letter, “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (2 Thess 2:16–17).

4.3.3 Confessing Sins to One Another

The next two ministries find their seat in one key verse situated in one particular circumstance. James 5:16 says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other. . . .” We will address both confession and prayer together, giving special focus on confession of sins in this section then some additional focus on prayer in the next section.

To understand the verse we must see the context. In the larger unit, James envisions three personal situations that his readers might face and three corresponding exhortations:

1. Is anyone in trouble? Then pray. (v. 13a)
2. Is anyone happy? Then sing. (v. 13b)
3. Is anyone sick? Then call for the elders (vv. 14–18)

The lesson of the section as a whole can be summarized in one simple, overarching piece of counsel: whatever your physical or emotional condition, go to God. If you are experiencing hardship or trouble (*kakopatheō*), then go to God in prayer (v. 13a). If you are experiencing happiness or good circumstances (*euthumeō*), then go to God with songs of praise (v. 13b). If you are experiencing illness, then go to God through his appointed elders so that they might pray for your healing and anoint you with oil (vv. 14–15), demonstrating the value of mutual confession and prayer (vv. 16–18). In other words, when things are good or when things are bad, the apostle calls believers to go to God. “He means that there is no time in which God does not invite us to himself” (Calvin 2010:354–355).

In verses 14–15 James gives instructions to the sick person about calling on the elders. The situation likely involves a severe illness, one that might suggest a deathbed scene or at least a situation where the person was unable to go to elders. It goes beyond

the scope of this thesis to address the many debatable issues that this passage raises: Is the sickness physical, spiritual, or both?⁵⁹ Is the oil symbolic or medicinal? What is the “prayer offered in faith”? Do these elders have the gift of healing? Is the sickness in this case sin related? Does the passage guarantee physical healing? We will need to touch on some of these matters as we focus on verse 16.

Verse 16 begins with “Therefore” (*oun*) followed by the two imperatives: confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. Before examining each, we should notice the connection between verses 14–15 and verse 16.

- Verses 14–15, Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.
- Verse 16, Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

That there is some connection is obvious, not only because of the “therefore” in verse 16 but also because of the similarity of topics—confessing sins, prayer, and healing. Yet there are also differences. The table below summarizes the similarities and differences.

Similarities between verses 14 –15 and verse 16	Differences between verses 14 –15 and verse 16
Presumed confession of sins in v. 15b and confession of sins in v. 16	Presumed confession of sins in vv. 14–15 is to the elders and is in the context of severe illness, and in v. 16 is to one another with no situation context stated
Prayer in vv. 14–15 (and v. 13) and in vv. 16 (and vv. 17–18)	Prayer in vv. 14–15 is by the elders for the seriously ill person and in v. 16 is by members for each other
Healing in some form in v. 15 and in v. 16	Specific context for healing in v. 15 but a general context in v. 16

What is the connection between verses 14–15 and verse 16? Most commentators understand the connection only in a general sense. They see that confession of sin and prayer in verses 14–15 are beneficial and valuable because they bring forgiveness and spiritual and/or physical healing, and that James therefore encourages everyone in verse

⁵⁹ For the sake of discussion, as I will note below, I believe that James is referring to physical illness and physical healing in verses 14–16, since this is the most common, natural use of the various terms (*ἀσθενεῖ, κάμνοντα, ἐγερεῖ, ἰαθῆτε*), especially when used without modification within the context. Moreover, the scenario suggests that the person is unable to go to the elders but needs to elders to come to him.

16 to confess their sins and pray for each other to likewise receive these benefits. Because God graciously heals and forgives people, and because he frequently uses confession and prayer, these are good spiritual disciplines for church members to practice. And this might bring the kind of spiritual or combined spiritual/physical healing that verse 16 promises.

This approach has been applied to church praxis in various ways, and there are strengths and weaknesses in each version. Some view the confession and prayer in verse 16 primarily as the obligation of individual believers to confess their personal offenses privately to those they have directly offended. Adamson (1976:199) writes, “The confession is to be not only to the elders (or other ministers) but *to one another*, that is, probably to those they have wronged.” While not holding this view himself, McCartney (2009:257) explains it, “This is not, then, a general exhortation to mutual confession but a practical application of Jesus’s teaching in Matt 5:24 that members of the church have an obligation to be reconciled to one another.” The difficulty, as McCartney proceeds to discuss, is that James does not refer to interpersonal conflict or to mutual or interpersonal forgiveness. Moreover, whatever forgiveness or restoration we see in the verse and its larger context (5:13–20) comes from God, not from one another.

Others view verse 16 as a warrant for priestly confession—for “designated elders to be the official hearers of confession and grantors of absolution” as McCartney (2009:257) summarizes the view (although this is not his view). McKnight (2011:445–447) favours this practice, at least as one possible expression of confession along with worship components like liturgical prayers of confession, requests for forgiveness, and declarations of pardon. However, while verses 14–15 picture someone seeking help from the elders, it is in a specific setting of severe illness, as suggested above. Besides, the picture in verse 16 is that of member-to-member *mutual* confession, not the confession of a member to an elder.

Most writers view the confession in verse 16 as some form of corporate confession. McCartney (2009:258) writes, “Corporate confession of corporate sins and prayer for one another heals the church’s wounds. This is particularly applicable to the situation described in 4:1–2 and 4:11–12 of mutual destructiveness that results from selfishness and judgmentalism.” Davids (1982:195–196) concurs,

James is speaking of confession in the community meetings (although he certainly does not exclude more detailed and private confession to another person), to one another (ἀλλήλοις). The role of the elders is not mentioned

(although in 5:15 they surely listen to a confession); one can assume that they guide the process.

Others like George Guthrie (2006:271) take a broader view that includes both corporate and individual confessions, and sees that as promoting both physical and spiritual healing.

Confession, a public acknowledgment of one's guilt, may be by an individual or as a community, and in many cases in biblical literature, confession is connected to physical healing or some general form of salvation. Thus James, dealing with communities in which there was a good bit of social strife, points to vital Christian remedies for fractured relationships—open confession of sin and mutual prayer, which are actions that promote transparency, support, and unity. Consequently, the exhortations to confession and prayer are followed by “so that” (*hopōs*), a marker showing the purpose for something, and that purpose in the present case is expressed as “you may be healed.” The healing in mind is physical but points to a deeper spiritual healing of sin and broken relationships.

All these positions above understand verse 16 to be a general principle not directly connected to the scenario in verses 14–15 and understand the healing in verse 16 to include spiritual components.

Moo (2000:245–246), however, takes a different approach. He believes that verse 16 ties directly back to verses 14–15 and serves as the conclusion to those verses. Both confession and prayer are needed so that there can be forgiveness and physical healing in these cases, cases where there might be sin-related physical illnesses among God's people. The strength of this view is that it best preserves the “therefore” link between verses 14–15 and verse 16. Moreover, Moo argues persuasively that the verb heal (*iaomai*) in verse 16 pertains to physical illness, not spiritual matters. “In the NT *iaomai* is used in a spiritual sense only in quotations from OT texts. When used independently, as here, it always is applied to a physical malady (Matt 8:8, 13; 15:28; Mark 5:29; Luke 5:17; 6:18, 19; 7:7; 8:47; 9:2, 11, 42; 14:4; 17:15; 22:51; John 4:47; 5:13; 12:40; Acts 9:34; 10:38; 28:8; the only exception is Heb 12:13, where sin has already been compared to a sickness).” Those who want to make healing in verse 16 a more general truth about spiritual health go beyond the meaning of the verse.

Overall, Moo's view best understands verse 16 in its context. The commands for believers to confess and to pray *in this passage* pertain to seasons of physical illness (albeit not always the severe situations needing elders' intervention as in vv. 14–15) and are not generally applicable to ongoing Christian fellowship, growth, and care. This does not mean that Christ and his apostles prohibited confessing sins to each other and praying for spiritual growth for one another. It merely means that they are beyond the

purview of this text. This does not invalidate the value of individuals reconciling offenses with one another, of individuals seeking spiritual help from pastors or other members that might include a confession of sin, or of corporate confessions of sins and declarations of pardon. At the same time, these do not seem to be what James 5:16 pictures.

4.3.4 Praying for One Another

In the section above, we considered the call to prayer in James 5:16, “pray for each other so that you may be healed.” We concluded that a direction connection exists between this call to prayer and the instructions in verses 14–15 concerning confession of sin and prayer in circumstances of physical illness. It is unlikely, therefore, that James intended this verse to be some kind of proof-text for general intercessory prayer, the way many in our day might use it. Beyond this, there are no explicit “pray for one another” commands in the New Testament.

We do find, however, some evidence for a call to mutual intercession. In the context of his instructions for the church to fight against satanic forces, the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 6:18, “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all of the Lord’s people.” The four-fold use of “all” (*pasēs, panti, pasē, pantōn*) is striking. Believers are to pray (1) on all occasions, (2) with all kinds of prayer and requests, (3) at all times, and (4) for all believers. Such a comprehensive exhortation would justify all sorts of member-for-member prayer.

Aside from this reference, other passages convey various but lesser degrees of comprehensiveness. In 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul urges that “petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people,” using four different terms for prayer, including *enteuxis*, which NIV translates as “intercession.” Knight (1992:115) summarizes these terms:

These four terms delineate aspects of what should mark prayers: *δεήσεις*, making requests for specific needs; *προσευχάς*, bringing those in view before God; *ἐντεύξεις*, appealing boldly on their behalf; and *εὐχαριστίας*, thankfulness for them. That the four words are plural points to more than one expression of prayer and suggests the involvement of a number of those in the congregation.

On whose behalf should the members pray? While the passage says, “for all people” (understanding *anthrōpōn* as generic), most commentators (Knight 1992:115; Towner 2006:167; W. Mounce 2000:78; Köstenberger 2006:510; seemingly Guthrie 1990:84)

believe Paul is directing the church to pray for the salvation of “all people” (based on vv. 4, 6) and for the subgroup of “kings and all those in authority” in the subsequent phrase (v. 2). Given this limitation, we can have no confidence that Paul intended verse 1 as a call for member-to-member mutual intercessory prayer.

In 1 John 5:16 we see an example of intercessory prayer for a church member who has sinned in some noticeable way. The apostle writes, “If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that.” While a full discussion of this knotty text goes beyond the scope of our thesis; my point here is simply to show that the New Testament’s vision of one-another mutual ministry includes church members praying for each other on spiritual matters. At the same time, the apostle John’s counsel to not pray for someone whose sin leads to death likely refers to those people who have openly rejected Christ or apostatized from the faith.

What can we conclude about the place of intercessory prayer among the members of New Testament churches? Aside from the above references, we find no explicit texts commanding members to pray for each other or descriptions of members actually praying for each other.⁶⁰ However, we can cautiously to argue that believers should and did pray for each other, based on the frequency and variety of New Testament passages about prayer. First, we know that Jesus interceded in prayer for his people, both during his earthly ministry (Luke 22:31–32; John 17) and from his seated place now at the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). We know that he instructed his disciples to pray (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:13; 18:1; etc.). And even though intercession might not have been explicitly stated it would be hard to imagine that this would not have been a component in their prayers, given his modelling for them of prayer.

Second, we see the early church praying (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23–25, 31; 12:5, 12; 16:13; 21:5). Acts 12:5 explicitly records the church interceding for Peter’s release from prison.

⁶⁰ Allison (2012:447–448) provides a helpful general summary of “the church’s prayers for its members.” However, with few exceptions (e.g., Eph 6:18), they do not necessarily describe average church members explicitly interceding for each other. They are either (1) prayers prayed by Jesus, the apostles, or elders on behalf of members (but not *by* members themselves), or (2) prayers offered or commanded to be offered by members for apostles, church leaders, gospel workers, government officials, enemies, unsaved people, etc. (but not *for* each other as non-leader members).

Third, Paul himself frequently interceded for the churches (Rom 1:8–10; 15:5–6, 13; 1 Cor 1:4–9; 16:23; 2 Cor 13:7–9; Gal 6:18; Eph 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Phil 1:3–6, 9–11; 4:23; Col 1:3–14; 1 Thess 1:2–3; 2:13; 3:9–13; 5:23–24, 28; 2 Thess 1:3, 11–12; 2:16–17; 2 Thess 3:5, 16; 2 Tim 1:16–18; 4:22; Titus 3:15; Phlm 1:4–7, 25). He repeatedly asked God to bring a variety of benefits and blessings to his people. In *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*, Carson (1992:70, 74) observes,

One of the remarkable characteristics of Paul’s prayers is the large proportion of space devoted to praying for others. . . . Paul’s prayers are outstanding for the large part intercession for others and thanksgiving for others play in them. . . . If we follow Paul’s example, then, we will never overlook praying *for others*.

Fourth, in turn, he called the churches to corporate prayer (Phil 4:6–7; Col 4:2; 1 Thess 5:17; 1 Tim 2:1–2, 8), and that included asking them to pray for him (Rom 15:30–33; Eph 6:19–20; Col 4:3–4; 1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:2). The breadth of terms in passages like 1 Timothy 2:1 (“petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving”) and Philippians 4:6 (“prayer and petition, with thanksgiving”) suggests categories that include intercessory prayer. Even though the contexts of these two verses do not picture *mutual* intercession per se, based on the rationale offered in the next, concluding paragraph, if members did pray for each other, these terms would supply a wide range of prayer forms.

We conclude that intercessory prayer was very likely part of the church activity of New Testament Christians and that the lack of general “pray for one another” commands does not mean that Jesus and his apostles did not encourage it or believers did not practice it. Given the sheer breadth and number of prayer passages above, it would be difficult to imagine that the New Testament believers did not practice intercession among the various ways they prayed for each other. Did the prayers by believers in Acts not include intercession for one another? Did the models of Jesus and Paul interceding not motivate or inform the church members? Did Paul’s pleas for the churches to pray not serve in some way to invite believers to pray for each other? As they read the many requests that Paul was making to the Father on their behalf were the believers not spurred to pray the same things for each other? In each case, it seems reasonable to assume that members practiced intercessory prayer for one another.

4.3.5 Bearing One Another's Sin Struggles and Restoring Members Who Stray from the Faith

How did the apostle Paul direct church members to deal with those among them who struggle with their sin? He envisions such a possibility in Galatians 6:1–2,

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

Three observations seem appropriate. First, the passage assumes that there is a person needing restoration. The context suggests that the person is part of the church community. While Paul uses the term *anthropōs*, this is likely generic. We have no reason to assume Paul refers to a real, existing case the way he does in other letters (e.g., 1 Cor 5:1; Phil 4:2–3), especially given the conditional structure (“if,” *ean*) of the sentence (Longenecker 1998:272; Moo 2013:374). Such a situation could occur in any church whenever a member fails to walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:21–26).

Notice how Paul describes the offender: He or she is a person who is “caught” (*prolambanō*) or trapped in a sin. Although Bruce (1982:260) notes that “the precise force of *προλημφθῆ* is uncertain: it may mean that he finds himself inadvertently involved in some wrongdoing, or that he is detected in it by someone else,” and Dunn slightly prefers the latter (1993:318–319), most commentators believe the former best fits the term. “Paul has in view a fault into which the brother is betrayed unawares, so that it is not intentionally wrong” (Delling 1967:14–15). “Whether the rendering “overtaken” (AV, RV, RSV) or “caught” (NASB, NIV, NEB mg.) be preferred, it is probably to be understood in the sense of being surprised by sin rather than being detected in it” (Fung 1988:284). See also Moo (2013:374), Schreiner (2010:357), Longenecker (1998:272) and Hansen (1994:*en.loc.*). While the text does not elaborate the nature of the sin struggle, the context of the Galatians 5:13–26 provides ample examples of the sins (e.g., 5:19–21, “the works of the flesh”) that could easily entangle any believer who fails to walk consistently by the Spirit.

Second, such a struggling sinner needs to be restored. The verb *katartizō* was used in other ancient Greek literature in Paul's day for the task of fishermen mending a torn fishing net (Matt 4:21; Mark 1:19) or physicians setting a broken or dislocated bone (Fung 1988:286). Schreiner (2010:357) adds the reference to rebuilding walls in Ezra 4:12–13 and notes that “restoration to spiritual health and vitality is in view here.” Moo (2013:375) also notes the “mending nets” imagery and sees the application as putting

something “in order”: “To ‘restore’ the offender is to put matters in order by integrating them back into full fellowship with the Lord and with their brothers and sisters.” One commonality in these images is the act of restoring something—or in our context, someone—to usefulness. Christians caught up in sin are hindered in their walk with Christ and lacks the ability to minister to others effectively. They cannot fulfil the lifestyle of grace and love pictured in the previous chapter (e.g., 5:13–14, 22–23).

Third, who should restore the trapped person? Galatians 6:1 addresses “Brothers and sisters,” referring to the congregation. (There are no references to church leaders in the Galatians letter, although we assume they existed and might be involved in the process.) By calling them brothers and sisters, Paul reminds them of their family oneness with and family duties toward the offender. However, he does not charge everyone with this ministry, only “you who live by the Spirit” (*pneumatikoi*, the spiritual ones). Presumably Paul refers to those he mentioned in the previous verses who live by the Spirit (5:16, 25), are led by the Spirit (5:18), manifest the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23), and keep in step with the Spirit (5:25). For the apostle, this description is what all believers should pursue and experience. There is no need to view these restorers as some higher level or advanced class of elite Christians (Rapa 2008:633; Schreiner 2010:357–358; Moo 2013:374–375).

How should these Spirit-empowered believers carry out this restorative work? The passage suggests three characteristics. First, they need to minister to the person gently (v. 1), recognizing gentleness as the fruit of the Spirit (5:23; also Col 3:12; Matt 11:28–30). Moo (2013:375) observes that “many brothers and sisters, whose sin is more inadvertent and who may already be feeling shame, will be brought to forgiveness and restoration to fellowship through gentleness and humility. Harshness may simply drive them further away.”

Second, they need to do so humbly, with proper self-examination (v. 2, “But watch yourselves”; vv. 3–4), recognizing that the restorer is susceptible to the same temptations. Schreiner (2010:358) captures the humility needed to intervene:

Those who restore the fallen remain humble because they remember their own fallibility and propensity to sin. They realize that they too may be tempted and fail. Today they are reinstating one who has sinned, but tomorrow they may need to be reinstated. Recognition of one’s own failures will keep believers from triumphalism or arrogance.

We note that Paul shifts here from the plural to the singular, calling the readers to individual self-examination before entering into this restorative ministry (Longenecker 1998:274).

Third, they need to minister purposefully, with intentionality. They should do so to obey Christ's law—the law of love—by bearing their brother or sister's burdens (v. 2; also 5:13–15).⁶¹ While “burden” in this context would include the sins in verse 1, since it is a broader word than sin it could include other difficulties the struggling person faces that are not limited to his personal sins. It could include the burdens of others (Schreiner 2010:358; Moo 2013:376).

What about more serious spiritual lapses? In James 5:19–20, the apostle James recognizes the dangers of apostasy within the body and the need for the church members to engage in the reclamation of wandering fellow members. Yet instead of assigning this ministry to the elders (whose roles are mentioned in the immediately preceding section, vv. 13–14), he addresses the other members:

My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

McKnight (2011:453) reminds us of the communal/familial setting (“brothers and sisters,” *adelphoi*, vv. 7, 9, 10, 12, and 19) and the pastoral concern (“one of you”) found in this passage. We learn here of the realistic possibility that individual members of the church (“one of you,” lit., “among you”) could wander from God's truth and will need their brothers and sisters to bring them back (Davids 1982:198; Blomberg & Kamell 2008: 248). The truth here, especially in an epistle like James with all its practicality and emphasis on doing and not just hearing God's Word, goes beyond mere doctrinal orthodoxy.

The truth does not refer here to Christian doctrine in the narrow sense, but more broadly to all that is involved in the gospel. This truth is something that is to be done as well as believed (cf. Ps. 51:6; Gal. 5:7; 1 John 1:6). And for James, of course, correct doctrine cannot be separated from correct behavior. What the mind thinks, and the mouth confesses, the body must do—anything less is worldly, sinful “double-mindedness” (1:8; 4:8). (Moo 2000:249)

The use of the term “way” in the next sentence reinforces this understanding (Davids 1982:199).

⁶¹ See Moo (2013:376–378) and Schreiner (2010:359–360) for discussions on the various ways scholars understand “the law of Christ

To wander here evidently does not refer to minor, casual slips or brief excursions into temptation. Davids (1982:198) notes the severity of the problem:

To wander (πλανηθῆναι) is to apostatize, i.e. to reject the revealed will of God and to act contrary to it, either through willfulness or the deceit of others (including demonic powers). The term is used in the LXX for transgression of the law, especially idolatry. . . . This same sense of the rejection of the right way and wandering into moral corruption (often due to the devil) appears in the NT. . . . Thus the seriousness of the problem appears from the first, particularly since morally corrupt behavior was neither accepted nor glossed over in the early church, but exposed and rejected.

Moo (2000:250) adds that the verb wander is a strong word that “often refers to any deviation from the truth of the faith, whether inadvertent or intentional, minor or major. And, since James suggests in v. 20 that the ‘wandering’ Christian is saved from spiritual death, the deviation from the faith here must be a very serious one, tantamount to apostasy.” McKnight (2011:453) and Martin (1998:217) agree.

What responsibilities does this sober circumstance give to the fellow church members of the person who has fallen away? Twice James uses the verb *epistrephō* (vv. 19, 20) to “bring back” or “turn back” the straying member. Elsewhere the New Testament uses it for initial conversion (Acts 3:19; 14:15; 15:19; 26:18; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Pet 2:25; etc.) but here it pictures ministering members making active efforts to persuade the straying member to repent and return to God.

James motivates his hearers to pursue the apostatizing member by holding out the beauty of restoration—to save the person from death and to cover over his sins. Moo (2000:250) comments, “Believers are encouraged to take action to turn around a sinner who has taken a wrong and ultimately ruinous path by considering the wonderful results of such successful intervention: a soul is saved from death and many sins are covered.” What kind of death does James fearfully foresee? Moo (2000:250) makes a strong case for what the New Testament would picture as eternal death.

“Death” here, as commonly in James and almost always in the NT where sin is the issue, is ultimate “spiritual” death—the condemnation to eternal damnation that results from unforgiven sin (James uses the noun “death” [*thanatos*] in this sense the one other time it occurs in his letter [1:15]). James pictures death as the final destination on the path that the sinner has determined to take: when he is turned back from that journey, he has “saved” his life (see Ezek. 18:27; Rom. 6:23; and note the spiritual application of “save” [*sōzō*] elsewhere in James: 1:21; 2:14; 4:12).

While the situation is sobering and the stakes are high in James 5:19–20, reclamation attempts by caring church members are surely worth the effort.

We turn to one more passage. The apostle Jude makes his writing purpose plain at the start of his brief letter, i.e., to “urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.” False teachers have infiltrated the church (vv. 3–4). He describes these ungodly men and their imminent destruction (vv. 5–16), then reminds his readers that previous apostles had prophesied these problems (vv. 17–19). What is Jude’s pastoral reply to these destructive apostates? He addresses the church as a whole with a series of imperatives, “But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (vv. 20–21). Jude then shifts his emphasis to ministry toward others, giving focused attention in verses 22–23 to helping those duped and infected by the false teachers:

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Dauids (2006:100) notes, “While the teachers have been roundly condemned, their followers are to be rescued rather than ostracized.”

Verses 22–23 certainly carry some complexity. Metzger’s (1994:658–659) textual commentary records no less than four variants—all “{C}-rated⁶²—in these two verses. For the reasons Metzger gives, and given the weight of contemporary translators and commentators, the translation given by the NIV above seems sound. Jude refers to three sub-groups with three commands, all of which call for merciful outreach to these imperilled members.

Who are the three groups and what ministry actions are indicated? The first command is to show mercy to those who doubt. The term translated “doubt” can refer to one who argues with others or one who discerns something. When it appears alone, as in this case, it carries the idea of inner conflicts, i.e., disputes with yourself, inner turmoil (Dauids 2006:100). Perhaps the teaching itself or the lifestyle example of the

⁶² According to Metzger (1994:xxviii), a “{C}” symbol “indicates that the Committee had difficulty in deciding which variant to place in the text.” My thesis will follow the approach seen in the critical editions of the Greek New Testament (*The Greek New Testament*, edited by B. Aland et al., 4th rev. ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft and United Bible Societies, 1994], and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by E. and E. Nestle, B. Aland et al., 27th rev. ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993]), taken by the NIV (and ESV, NASB95, HCSB), and most evangelical commentators. See Dauids (2006:100–101) for a defense of this position, and Green (2008:124–125) for a different textual discussion and a conclusion that sees two commands not three.

false teachers Jude is exposing has led these individuals to be uncertain about the Christian faith. In other words, here is a person with inward doubts about the gospel. Jude's counsel to the members of the church, as they reach out to person, is to show mercy. Mercy is something Jude wishes on his readers (v. 2) and promises to his readers (v. 21). In light of this,

it is appropriate that they show mercy rather than judgment to others. . . . Rather than condemning them for their uncertainty about the truth or their entertaining the possibility that the teachers whom Jude opposes could be right, Jude calls for mercy, being gracious toward them and showing the same type of acceptance and love that God shows. (Davids 2006:100–101)

The second group seems further along the path of apostasy: “save others by snatching them from the fire.” The fire here suggests final judgment, as is common in Scripture, with the “snatching from fire” a probable allusion to Zechariah 3:2 (Green 2008:125; Davids 2006:101; Schreiner 2003:488; Bauckham 1998:115). Davids (101) suggests that these are people who are no longer in the middle, vacillating. They were “already getting involved with the practices of the teachers Jude is opposing” and they are “teetering on the edge” of final judgment. Green (125) concurs, “The implication appears to be that they had succumbed to the persuasion of the heretics and had themselves become liable to the judgment about which Jude has warned throughout this epistle.”

The rescue effort, in turn, needs to be direct, swift, and vigorous. “In Jude's picture the flames of judgment already lap around their feet; one must snatch them away before they are fully in flame and lost forever” (Davids 2006:102). The church must “snatch” (*harpasate*) them, a verb that implies a sudden, forceful, speedy rescue (Green 2008:125).

Who are they? They are church members, influenced by false teachers and involved with sinful behaviour, but seemingly willing to repent when confronted (Bauckham 1998:115). What might that entail? Green (2008:126) writes,

Rapid and drastic measures must be taken to rescue those who have become wayward. Errant members are not to be simply dismissed but also sought out and delivered from the error into which they have fallen. This mutual care for errant members became a key theme in the corporate life of the church (Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6–15) and was not simply the domain of the congregational leadership. . . . To bring the whole church into the attempt to modify the behavior of the individual is a powerful means of persuasion and an effective plan of rescue.

Green supports our thesis, highlighting the ministry of the members, not merely the leaders. What steps might this require? Citing the same passages as Green, Bauckham (1998:115) observes, “It is not necessary for Jude to explain how his readers are to snatch them from the fire, because it was understood everywhere in the early church that an erring brother must be rebuked and warned in a spirit of brotherly love.” Whatever it looks like, the attitude must be restorative not punitive (Davids 2006:102).

Commentators understand the third group (v. 23b, “to others show mercy, mixed with fear”) in one of two ways (Davids 2006:102–103). It might be another way to speak of the second group, with the previous clause (v. 23a, “snatch others. . . .”) perhaps stating the rescue goal and this clause showing the ministry attitude of mercy and fear. More likely, however, it refers to a third group of people who have gone even further down the path of apostasy and are now fully committed to the false teachers’ lifestyle. Perhaps they are heavily engaged in the immorality (“corrupted flesh”) that the false teaching ultimately produces. This group might even include the false teachers (Schreiner 2003:488–489). But whether there is a third group or only two groups, the picture here is of members or former members involved with clearly evil practices.

In this case, the ministry must still include mercy—God is able to restore the most hardened or vile person. But it also must include fear. Fear of what? Davids (2006:103–104) lists several suggestions. It could mean reverential fear of God but that is a broad concept not readily connected with mercy or with the final line, “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” Others view it as the fear of God’s or Christ’s judgement, but similar objections can be raised as with the prior view.

The best answer connects with last line. The rescuing members must do so with mercy but also with fear of sin—fear of the contamination that can come when one tries to reach out to those indulging in serious sin and hating the sin that brings such corruption (Schreiner 2003:488–489; Green 2008:127). Davids (2006:1003–104) concurs and understands Jude to be warning his Christian readers that

in showing mercy to those who are sinning it is quite possible to get drawn into their sin. Thus Jude advises showing mercy in fear. One is working on the edge of the fire, so to speak. Not only are those being rescued at risk, but the rescuers are also endangering themselves. Sin is deceitful enough that those trying to help others could themselves get trapped. That is no reason not to “show mercy,” but every reason to have fear. . . . Such advice is wise indeed. One cannot rescue people without personal contact, but one must also be cautious that what seduced them does not seduce you. It is quite possible to remain in positive contact and accept a person without at the same time condoning or accepting the person’s sin. This appears to be Jude’s position, a merciful one indeed.

By “hating” the garments and corrupt flesh of these straying members, those who seek to restore them will be more firmly protected from the contamination that comes from the lies and the lifestyle of false teachers.

Jude closes his letter with some encouragement to the concerned readers, the church members who belong to Christ because they have been “called, loved, and kept” (v. 1). God will enable them to carry out these ministries of rescuing mercy in verses 22–23 by heeding verse 21, “Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life,” and by resting in the assurance of verse 24, trusting in “him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. . . .” Again, as we have seen in chapters three and four, the indicatives of God’s redeeming work motivate and empower believers toward mutual care ministries.

While other passages address more formal or more extended steps of restorative discipline for those who stray (e.g., Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5; 2 Thess 3:14–15; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 3:10 mentioned above), the above three passages—Galatians 6:1–2; James 5:19–20; and Jude 22–23, from three different apostles and addressed to church members as members⁶³—give a vision of what mutual care looks like when members turn away from the Lord and his church.

4.3.6 Maintaining and Pursuing Relational Peace and Reconciliation⁶⁴

Peace is a vital part of healthy church life and a significant aspect of mutual care among church members. It is no wonder that the call for believers in Christ to maintain and pursue peace is a frequent command throughout the New Testament. We start this section with an overview of God’s provisions for peace and then consider the command to members to pursue relational peace with each other.

⁶³ This does not mean to imply that the other passages do not address church members or that they are unimportant. My purpose in this section is not to be exhaustive or to explore the larger topic of restorative church discipline but to be selective among several different apostles (Paul, James, and Jude), for the sake of space.

⁶⁴ A large part of the material in this chapter also appeared in my previously published book, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), but none of this was part of any previous academic degree program.

4.3.6.1 The peacemaking initiative and provisions of the God of peace. Like other aspects of mutual member ministry, as we saw in chapter three, we can look at the triune God for his work of creating and sustaining true peace. God is the God of peace, his Son is the Prince of Peace, and his Spirit brings peace. What has this God done? He has made peace with his people, he pours out his peace on his people and into his people, and he calls and enables his people to pursue peace with each other and with those outside the church.

The New Testament links God and peace in at least four ways: There is the *saving peace* that God made with believers at the cross, and the ongoing *inner peace* God gives believers in their souls. These twin gifts in turn bring two more blessings for the Christian. They enable them to pursue *relational peace* with others in this life. And they guarantee them an endless life of future *situational peace* in the life to come, in “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13).

By many authors in various chapters, these four divine peace provisions-promises weave their way through the Scriptures. We can start with the epistle to the Romans. Most scholars view Romans as Paul’s most important book and the gospel as its overarching theme. Kruse (2012:xvi) represents many when he writes,

The Letter to the Romans is arguably the apostle Paul’s most important piece of writing. While it addresses issues of crucial importance for first-century believers, in particular those of the Christian congregations in Rome, in doing so it also addresses matters of great importance for believers of all times. Romans is essentially an exposition and defense of the gospel of God concerning his Son, Jesus Christ, a gospel in which the righteousness of God is revealed for the salvation of all who believe in his Son.

Yet, as Kruse (2012:9–11) argues, Paul’s purpose was to minister to the believers in Rome, especially against the backdrop of the many conflicts within the Roman Christian community. Schreiner (1998:19) concurs. After surveying various suggestions, he asserts, “none of them adequately delineates the purpose for Romans. I would like to suggest that there are various purposes in Romans, and only by interpreting the various sections of the letter can we discern which purpose is ultimate. One reason Paul wrote was to resolve the conflict between Jews and Gentiles in Rome.” Schreiner then develops this major theme of unity, showing how the theological themes had purposes to resolve divisions and how Paul’s ultimate goal is to have “a harmonious church would bring honor and praise to God’s name” (22–23).

In other words, the epistle brilliantly describes and declares not only God's salvation work but also his peacemaking work. The reason is obvious: the gospel of Jesus is the gospel of peace. Therefore, it should not surprise us to see the four divine peace provisions-promises throughout Paul's letter.

First, Romans teaches church members that they have saving peace with God. The opening verses tell us that this letter is all about the gospel of God that centres in his Son. It is the good news of God's saving grace in Jesus for sinners. That good news is all about God's peace. Paul closes his introduction with this promise and blessing, "To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7). The apostle announces God's stance—his posture of grace and peace toward his people.

This peace is more than the absence of war and strife. It is the positive presence of harmony, salvation, joy, blessing, and reconciliation—"the state of perfect well-being created by God's eschatological intervention and enjoyed by the righteous" (Moo 1996:139). In the context of Romans, it is the reconciliation of believing Jews and believing Gentiles with God and with each other—both vertical and horizontal reconciliations. Christians taste it now whenever they enjoy the fruits of repentance, confession, and forgiveness with each other. One day they will experience it fully.

Who will experience this final peace? Those who belong to God. The apostle both promises and warns, "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." (Rom 2:9–10).

How does someone gain God's peace? Romans 5:1–2 replies, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God." In this compact summary of gospel blessing, Paul tells believers that (1) they now have peace with God; (2) this peace is built on their justification through faith, God's grace-work of declaring them righteous in Christ; and (3) that this salvation peace produces confident access into God's blessings and hope.

The saving work of God, however, does not merely consist of a right standing with God. He also gives his people a second gift, inner peace. In salvation, God has done something not only for them, but also *in* them. Christian growth—sanctification in its past, present, and future aspects—began with a decisive act by God of severing the

spinal cord of sin and making believers new people who are now inclined to love and obey him. The apostle Paul describes this internal transformation, “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:6–8). The sinful mind is hostile to God, but the saved mind—the mind captured and controlled by the Holy Spirit—reflects the life and peace of God’s Spirit.

The twin gifts of God’s reconciling peace through Christ’s cross and God’s inner peace through his Spirit lead to the third peace blessing, namely, relational peace with others. In one of the Bible’s most realistic texts concerning human relationships, Romans 12:18 exhorts his readers, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

With whom must Christians seek peace? While the context of Romans 12:18 primarily concerns pursuing peace with non-Christians, chapters 14–15 address relationships between believers within the body of Christ. In the middle of his discussion he tells us what God treasures above all in his church: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval” (Rom 14:17–18). Five observations about the peace that Jesus prizes flow from this passage:

- (1) This peace, in this context, concerns Christians’ relationships with one another, i.e., horizontal peace with each other more than vertical peace with God.
- (2) This peace is linked with “righteousness” and “joy” as a central feature of God’s kingdom.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Commentators differ on the relationship between “righteousness” on the one hand and “peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” on the other hand. Schreiner (1998:741) sees righteousness, peace, and joy as three gifts of the Holy Spirit and given to those who belong to God’s kingdom. They include both present realities and eschatological promises, with Paul’s emphasis here on the power of God’s Spirit. Kruse (2012:523) understands righteousness as justification that leads to righteous relational behavior (e.g., the strong limiting their freedom out of love for the weak) and to the fruits of peace and joy (as understood in both one’s peace and joy from God expressing itself in peaceful, joyful relationships with one another). Moo (1996:857) argues that the context focuses on Christian relationships, that righteousness refers to ethical righteousness toward one another, that peace refers to mutual harmony (in part because of v. 19), that when these realities are operative then joy will mark the community, and that “all three blessings come as a result of the believer’s experience of the Holy Spirit.” Moo’s position seems preferable, based on the preceding and following context.

- (3) Christ values these virtues over a person's individual convictions related to disputed areas of conduct like "eating" or "drinking."
- (4) This peace comes to them through the work of God's Holy Spirit (as 15:13 below).
- (5) This peace concerns their relationships with one another (i.e., horizontal peace), and pleases God and other people.

Paul then inserts a summary challenge: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (14:19). Morris (1988:489) observes, "In the New Testament the most important thing about peace is that Christ has brought about peace with God, but in passages like this one the thought is rather that of peace with one another."

Thankfully, God does not leave the church alone in pursuing peace. As God's people pursue relational peace, he promises to be with them. The apostle rounds out the larger unit with a hope-giving wish-prayer in Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The joy and peace that the gospel promises come to Christians solely as God's gifts. They come from God himself, the triune God of hope and peace. They come through the Holy Spirit's power, since "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, etc. (Gal 5:22–23). While this text could refer to inner peace (below), it likely refers to relational peace between members of the body (Moo 1996:881; Kruse 2012:534; Dunn 1998:851).

How do believers actually receive these gifts? Do they arise instantaneously? No. Romans 15:13 says that they receive these gifts as they trust in God. While the cooperative working between God and the believer is delicate, we must not overlook the fact that these blessings do not come to Christians apart from their faith. Only as they trust God—what Dunn (1998:851) calls "openness to God and unreserved reliance on God"—will they experience his joy, peace, and hope in their one-another relationships. By faith they can know these gifts in increasing measures. As they practice biblical peacemaking—as they "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3)—they will experience the Holy Spirit's help.

The last two peace texts in Romans fasten the readers' eyes on God himself by calling him "the God of peace" (15:33; 16:20; see also 1 Cor 14:33; 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:20–21). In Romans 15:33, Paul again brings a wish-prayer for God's people, a glorious benediction flowing from God's grace: "The God of peace be with you all. Amen."

Lastly, as the God of peace, he promises one more mighty shalom-blessing: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20). Here the apostle Paul spans salvation history from start to finish in a single verse, pointing ultimately to God’s final eschatological victory (Schreiner 1998:804–805; Moo 1996:932–933; Dunn 1998:905; Harrison & Hagner 2008:233; Osborne 2004:414–415). He alludes to Genesis 3:15 and God’s first redemptive promise to bring forth the “seed of the woman” (a reference to the Messiah) to destroy Satan. And who is the God who will act to fulfil salvation history? Paul explicitly calls him the “God of peace.” In other words, it is God both as Redeemer and as *Peacemaker* who sent his Son to complete his saving program, destroy the devil, and end the warfare begun in Genesis 3. In his return, the Lord Jesus will bring about the final situational peace of paradise restored on earth.

4.3.6.2 The call to church members to maintain and pursue peace. In light of God’s initiative and provisions for relational peace, what do Jesus and his apostles command believers to do? Several of Jesus’s commands can set the stage for the urgency and responsibility that Jesus places upon his people to pursue mutual peace. If you know what someone has something against you, you should prioritize (“first go”) the pursuit of reconciliation even above offering your temple sacrifice (Matt 5:23–24). On the other hand, if someone has offended you, you should go directly to that person to point out their fault (Matt 18:15) and rebuke him (Luke 17:3b–4) to restore the relationship. By issuing these directives, Jesus reminds his people that he expects that they will have conflicts. His disciples proved that frequently. No relationship under God’s sun is conflict-free, not even within the church. Conflict is inevitable. Yet God also expects his people to seek to resolve their conflicts.

In the verses above, Jesus gave two complementary commands. In Matthew 5:23–25 he urges his followers to reconcile with anyone who has something against them. Then, in Matthew 18:15–16, he also tells them to reconcile with anyone who has sinned against them. In other words, when member Alex sins against member Ben, then member Alex should seek to reconcile with member Ben (5:23–26). On the other hand, when member Alex is sinned against by member Ben, then member Alex should seek to reconcile with member Ben (18:15–16). In either circumstance, Jesus calls member Alex to pursue peace. (Of course, he calls member Ben to do the same.)

In addition to Jesus’s exhortations, the apostles called church members to make active, diligent, immediate efforts to pursue peace. They too expressed urgency and

energy in their exhortations in passages like Romans 12:18; 14:19; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 4:2; Col 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:22; and Hebrews 12:14) The cumulative effect of these eight passages leaves no room for complacency or passivity. Instead, they constrain sincere Christians to cry out for the Holy Spirit's help for this formidable task.

Romans 12:18 in particular gives the church clear directions for reconciling relationships: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." First, keeping in mind the larger context, Christians must pursue peace in light of God's mercy toward them in Christ. The entire twelfth chapter flows from God's saving grace expounded in detail in Romans 1–11. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship" (12:1). In other words, church members must apply Romans 12:18 against the backdrop of 12:1–2 and the preceding eleven chapters. Peacemaking is but one way they offer themselves to God in sacrificial worship, and that obedience, like every other command in Romans 12, arises from the gospel of God's mercy in Christ.

Second, Paul teaches that Christians must pursue peace as part of their Christian duty. The apostle commands them to live at peace. To fail to seek peace with people is to disobey God.

Third, Christians must pursue peace with everyone. The peacemaking charge in this text is comprehensive; it encompasses all of the reader's relationships. The Lord does not permit his followers to ignore even one relationship or dismiss any individual. Similarly, the apostle declared in Acts 24:16, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." While this "with everyone" (Rom 12:18) and "God and man" (Acts 24:16) standard is admittedly high, God's resources make his commands less burdensome.

Fourth, as Christians actively pursue peace, the apostle urges them to leave the results to God. "If it is possible," Paul reminds them, they should live at peace. He acknowledges that a peaceful result may not be possible. Believers have no guarantee that the other person will follow God's peacemaking plan. Even Jesus, the perfect peacemaker, suffered crucifixion. Schreiner's (1998:673) perspective captures the balance:

One of the marks of Christians is a winsome and friendly spirit that delights in peace and harmony, not arguments and division. Nonetheless, Paul recognizes that the goal of peace with all people cannot be realized perfectly. He qualifies it

with the words εἰ δυνατόν τὸ ἐξ ὑμῶν (*ei dynaton to ex hymōn*, if possible so far as it depends on you). In other words, peace with all people is not possible in every situation. One cannot violate the truth of the gospel and devotion to Christ in order to make peace with those who resist the truth. Further, one may desire to be at peace with others, but they do not extend the same hand of charity back. In this instance peace is unattainable, not because we have failed to strive for peace but because the other person refuses to reconcile.

Nevertheless, the apostle calls believers to pursue peace and concurrently entrust the other person into God's hands.

The call to “pursue peace” emerges in four other passages, each of which contains the same powerful verb *diōkō*: Romans 14:19; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:15; and 1 Peter 3:11. We will consider the first three. We saw in Romans 14:17–18 above the high premium that Paul places on relational peace within the church: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.” He then exhorts his readers in verse 19: “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” The verb “make every effort” translates the Greek word (*diōkō*), elsewhere translated in the New Testament as pursuing, tracking down, or persecuting someone or something. It is used in a similar sense for pursuing peace by Paul again in 2 Timothy 2:22, by the unnamed writer to the Hebrews (Heb 12:14), and by the apostle Peter (1 Pet 3:11; citing Ps 34:14). Here the verb carries a sense of “earnest application” (Morris 1988:489, contrasted with “a slight interest”). Osborne (2004:371) observes,

The idea of “pursuing peace” occurs frequently in the New Testament (2 Tim 2:22; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 3:11; cf. 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:3; 1 Thess 5:13; Jas 3:18) and is an essential component of life in the Spirit. The point here is that corporate peace takes tremendous energy, and the strong must “pursue” it with all the strength they have, especially since their tendency is to stress their freedom at the expense of peace.

The same verb recurs in 2 Timothy 2:22, “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” While the command here is addressed to Timothy and not necessarily to the church as a whole (as in Rom 14:19 above or Heb 12:14 below), we can nevertheless reflect on its meaning in this passage. Köstenberger (2006:583–584) observes, “The intensity of the apostle’s pleading with Timothy does not let up. Paul urges his foremost disciple to ‘flee’ and ‘pursue’.” Köstenberger then refers back to 1

Timothy 6:11 for the sense behind this pair of negative and positive verb: “Paul’s commands for Timothy to ‘flee’ and ‘pursue’ underscore the intensity with which his apostolic delegate is to fulfill his calling. Both are strong verbs, indicating that Timothy is to be active in both directions” (555). Knight (1992:420–421) adds some flavour,

“διώκε is used in the NT either of persecution or, as here, in the sense of ‘pursue,’ ‘follow zealously after’ Christian virtues. . . . In particular, the peace brought by Christ enables Christians to live at peace and to continually pursue that which makes for peace with one another (Eph. 2:14–18; Rom. 14:19; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15). This note dominates Paul’s letters and is most likely in view here.

Knight’s last sentence not only captures nicely the thrust of this section but also underscores one of the main points in our thesis, i.e., the centrality of mutual member care in the New Testament letters as empowered by the gospel.

We find the same command emerge again in Hebrews 12:14, “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” France (2006:174) links this passage to the previous context in 12:1–13, especially verses 12–13: “The imperative ‘pursue’ (NIV, ‘make every effort’) suitably links with the race metaphor: these are the ‘straight paths’ they are to follow.” The Scripture writer stresses the importance of peace by placing it first in the Greek text, a position of emphasis (Cockerill 2012:634; Ellingworth 1993:661; Allen 2010:585). As with the Pauline uses, the commentators note the force of the verb. Lane (1998:449) writes, “The verb διώκειν, “to pursue,” which is a stronger term than the more usual ζητεῖν, “to seek,” connotes an earnest pursuance. The implied intensity underscores the urgency with which this pastoral directive addresses the community. . . . The stress falls on active Christian effort in response to divine gifts.” O’Brien (2010:472) agrees, “The verb ‘to pursue’ is stronger than the more usual ‘seek’ (1 Pet. 3:11), and draws attention to an intensity and urgency that the community needs to display in order to heed the exhortation: *make every effort*.” Allen (2010:585) adds that the verb here connotes “earnest, diligent, continuous pursuit of something.” Church members must actively and energetically *pursue* peace and not passively assume it naturally happen.

One interpretive question arises concerning the placement of the phrase “with everyone” (*meta pantōn*). Does it modify the verb “pursue” (e.g., “with everyone else pursue peace and holiness,” a corporate pursuit) or the object “peace” (e.g., “pursue peace with everyone,” in every relationship)? While acknowledging the last view as most common and certainly possible, Cockerill (2012:633–634) argues for the first view

and offers two reasons. First, proper Greek grammar would support this translation and the Hebrews writer uses high quality Greek. Second, it best fits the communal concerns he expresses in the immediate context (vv. 15–16). So a translation like “Together with all [fellow believers] keep pursuing peace....” would best reflect the Scripture writer’s “diligent quest to maintain their common harmony [as] the urgent and joint task of all.” This interpretation would be similar to Paul’s exhortation to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22 that we considered above, “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, *along with those who call on the Lord* out of a pure heart” (emphasis added). Lane (1998:450) concurs, arguing that the preposition *meta* (instead of *sun* or *pros*) would support this translation, and proposing the sense that the believers should pursue peace and holiness “together with all the other believers.”⁶⁶

The second view, represented by most commentators (e.g., O’Brien 2010:472, Ellingworth (1993:661–662), Bruce, France 2006:174; Allen 2010:585) and contemporary English translations (NIV, ESV, NASB95, HCSB), seems more likely. It better fits the epistle writer’s concern for harmony, better corresponds with the other *diōkō* passages above, and better explains the apparently allusion to Psalm 34:14. Grammatically, Ellingworth argues that the preposition *meta* need not be limited to the sense of “together with,” citing lexical authorities (Bauer and Blass & DeBrunner) and illustrating it with Romans 12:18 where *meta pantōn* occurs in the same sense as in our passage. Church members must pursue peace with everyone, in every relationship.

As we close this section, this chapter, and the body of this thesis, we see that Jesus and his apostles called members of the local churches—based on the gospel—to cherish their relationships and to pursue relational peace and harmony with each other. Emerging from that sense of oneness, and in turn furthering and feeding that oneness, God calls believers to demonstrate their mutual care in their attitudes, actions, and words.

⁶⁶ At the same time, Lane also understands peace not in the sense of relational peace but in a broader, eschatological, salvific sense of God’s promised presence. This understanding of peace would incline him to the first view of what the *meta pantōn* modifies.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Based on what we have seen in previous chapters, the following five conclusions seem warranted.

1. Systematic theology manuals as a whole have given sufficient treatment to the church's ministry to its members in general, and especially to the members' mutual caring ministries. When theology manuals do address the topic of ministry, they tend to focus on the church's mission to the world or on the ministry of the elders and deacons, but not on the member-to-member ministries within the church. The New Testament has much to say about these topics, and far less to say about matters like polity and sacraments, yet the latter topics tend to occupy relatively much more space in systematic theology manuals. This thesis has shown how much one-another ministry dominates the New Testament landscape.

2. The New Testament places a very high value on the ministry role of members, an importance that is at least as high if not higher than the role of leaders. Many of the epistles make little or no reference to the role of pastors but virtually all of them refer to one-another ministries. Even books that refer to pastors, like Philippians (in 1:1), say little if anything about their role. In addition, passages like Ephesians 4:11–16 that discuss the role of pastors remind us that one of their chief duties is to equip members to carry out their one-another ministries, again highlighting the importance of mutual care. The dynamic of New Testament church life and ministry, especially in the epistles (given the focus in Acts on the apostles and on the spread of the gospel to the nations), seems centred on the Lord's work in the lives of its members and on their mutual ministries to each other. The members of the churches are God's ministering people.

3. The range of New Testament ministries of mutual care is remarkably extensive. Church members actively engaged in, and were called to engage in, a wide range of one-another commands. We saw some positive examples in the Acts narratives. We do not know to what extent the church members who received the epistles actually implemented the directives. Yet the New Testament's design for mutual care is comprehensive. Such ministries would begin with attitudes. Members were commanded to see themselves as one with each other in the same body, to seek to be same-minded about their Christian faith and practice, to accept one another despite secondary differences, to adopt a family identity as brothers and sisters together, and to feel

empathy for fellow members who suffer. These attitudes would then fan out into numerous forms of action ministries and speaking ministries. If they obeyed the New Testament's vision for mutual care, they would greet each other with affection. They would spend time in each other's homes and eat together as brothers and sisters. The members would share sacrificially their material possessions with fellow members in need. They would provide hospitality, not only for traveling Christians and itinerant ministers but also for one another as they met in homes. As special needs arose, they would care for widows and orphans among them and they would visit and feed any of their members imprisoned for their faith. Moreover, they would also speak words of mutual care. The members would teach, encourage, and admonish one another with God's Word. They confessed their sins to each other and prayed for each other, not only for physical needs but also for spiritual growth and strength. They would bear with each other's sin struggles and temptations. If one of them turned away from the Lord, the others would pursue that fellow member. When conflicts arose among them, they would pursue peace with one another. In all, we identified seventeen categories of mutual care. If their members followed the New Testament examples and commands, then each church would indeed be, as our thesis contended, God's designed agent and setting for mutual Christian care.

4. The New Testament repeatedly teaches that these ministries of mutual care were to be responses to the saving work of Christ and his Spirit in their lives. The redemptive work of the triune God—both in actual inward grace imparted and in the models of God and Christ's ministries pictured—provides Christians with the power and the examples needed to minister to each other. We saw that the examples of Christ's humble incarnation, his life of sacrificial love, and his voluntary death on the cross function throughout the New Testament to invite, model, and encourage believers to minister to one another. Moreover, the relational graces and ministry gifts of Christ's Spirit motivate, guide, and empower these displays of mutual care. The Lord intends his churches to become transformed communities of mutual care. In this pursuit of mutual care, his churches would then humbly display the ongoing redemptive work of Jesus to a watching world.

5. The church life of the New Testament was largely set in homes. The fact that the epistles only occasionally *specify* a particular household church might give modern church leaders and members, especially in my North American context, the wrong impression that household churches were the exception rather than the norm. Yet the

contemporary notion of a congregation of a hundred or so people gathering in a dedicated church building is foreign to the first century. In the New Testament, the normal setting for church gatherings and one-another ministries of mutual care was in the homes of members. Moreover, depending on the size of the host member's house, the size of these household churches typically numbered twenty or thirty people, with likely no more than fifty at the most. Meeting together in homes made implementing the New Testament design more practical and personal than might be possible in other larger or more formal settings.

At the same time, this thesis certainly does not exhaust the topic. More study can be done on many aspects that my research has merely touched on. At least two further areas come to mind.

First, given my position as an Anglo American writing in the United States, it would be helpful to know what non-English writers think about the ways that these one-another ministries work, especially those living, teaching, and serving outside the United States or in culturally-diverse settings.

Second, it would be helpful to know more archaeological detail about the actual houses where the New Testament house churches met. In chapter two, we considered the conclusions of Murphy-O'Connor, Banks, and Gehring about the probable physical dimensions and the number of people who might have participated in house church meetings. Gaining more information about these matters might yield greater understanding of how the mutual care ministries actually occurred.

To conclude this Conclusion: I have emerged from this study with a clearer conviction that the New Testament church is indeed God's designed agent and setting for the ministry of mutual Christian care, and I hope that this thesis will help readers to adopt this same conviction.

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**Appendix: Spiritual Gifts in Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4;
and 1 Peter 4**

The table below lists twenty-six spiritual gifts found in four key sections of Scripture. Where the same or similar Greek terms occurred in different texts I merged them as one item with multiple scriptural references (e.g., #9, #15). I left as separate some items that seemed synonymous but not identical (e.g., #5 with #21); these too could perhaps be merged into one gift in actual practice (with the semantic differences merely stylistic). Lastly, I included items that describe not only abilities but also ministry actions (e.g., #1, #3) and those that describe individuals who do them (e.g., #19, #20) and gifted people themselves (e.g., #16, #17, #18; comparing #17 with #1, and #18 with #3).

#	USB4 Greek NT (Aland et.al. 2006)	References	NIV Translation
1	Προφητείαν (cf. #17)	Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10; 13:2; 14:1ff	Prophesying; prophecy
2	Διακονίαν; διακονεῖ	Rom 12:7; 1 Pet 4:11	Serving
3	Διδάσκων; διδασχῆ (cf. #18)	Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 14:6,26	Teaching, instruction
4	Παρακαλῶν	Rom 12:8	Encouraging
5	Μεταδιδούς	Rom 12:8	Contributing to the needs of others, giving
6	Προϊστάμενος	Rom 12:8	Leadership, governing
7	ἐλεῶν	Rom 12:8	Showing mercy
8	λόγος σοφίας	1 Cor 12:8	The message of wisdom
9	λόγος γνώσεως; εἰδῶ τὰ μυστήρια πάντα καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γνῶσιν	1 Cor 12:8; 13:2; 14:6	The message of knowledge; fathom all mysteries and all knowledge
10	Πίστις	1 Cor 12:9; 13:2	Faith
11	Χαρίσματα ἰαμάτων	1 Cor 12:9,28,30	Gifts of healing
12	Δυνάμεις; ἐνεργήματα δυνάμεων	1 Cor 12:10,28,29	Miraculous powers
13	Διακρίσεις πνευμάτων	1 Cor 12:10	Distinguishing between spirits
14	ἐτέρῳ γένη γλωσσῶν	1 Cor 12:10,28, 30; 13:1; 14:2ff	Speaking in different kinds of tongues
15	ἐρμηνεία γλωσσῶν; διερμηνεύουσιν	1 Cor 12:10,30; 14:5,26ff	Interpretation of tongues
16	ἀποστόλους	1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11	Apostles
17	Προφήτας (cf. #1)	1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11	Prophets
18	Διδασκάλους (cf. #3)	1 Cor 12:28,29; Eph 4:11	Teachers (linked with pastors in Eph 4:11)
19	ἀντιλήμψεις	1 Cor 12:28	Those able to help others
20	Κυβερνήσεις	1 Cor 12:28	Those with gifts of administration
21	ἅ ὅσα ἔχω πάντα	1 Cor 13:3	Give all I possess
22	παραδῶ τὸ σῶμά μου ἵνα καυχήσωμαι	1 Cor 13:3	Surrender my body to the flames
23	ἐν ἀποκαλύψει	1 Cor 14:6,26	A revelation
24	εὐαγγελιστάς	Eph 4:11	Evangelists
25	Ποιμένας	Eph 4:11	Pastors (linked with teachers here)
26	λαλεῖ	1 Pet 4:11	Speaking