

## Ephesians 4C

- So today we continue in Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts within the body
  - We're studying how spiritual gifts contribute to the unity of the body
    - Unity has been Paul's topic since Chapter 3
    - And God's call for unity in the church is a wonderful example of God's sense of humor
    - In the church, God has taken people from every walk of life, from different cultures, different languages, different perspectives...
    - And He has told us we are united into one group
    - This is a unity that defies human nature, which is exactly the point since God unites us spiritually despite our natural differences
  - In that way the body of Christ is an opposite to the nation of Israel
    - In the case of Israel, the Lord created a people out of nothing
    - They began as a single family created by covenant and set apart from all other people
    - Israel was like box of Cheerios...
    - Almost identical to one another
    - But unique in the world
  - On the other hand, God made His church to be like a box of Fruit Loops...
    - The body of Christ comes in a rainbow of colors and flavors
    - Each of us very different from another
    - But God has knit us together into a common gathering, a body of believers who reflect the world's diversity
    - We too were set apart as was Israel, but we're set apart spiritually
- And key to maintaining our oxymoronic unity-through-diversity are the spiritual gifts Christ has given to His body

- Last week we learned that the Lord took great steps to connect the church saints to things before and things to come
  - Jesus descended into the lower parts of the earth to preach to the captives before setting them free to enter Heaven
  - And at that time, Christ also gave gifts to His Bride, the Church
  - He did this to communicate that Church saints are just as much a part of His family as those who came before
  - And He did it to ensure we would enjoy the same unity that Jews knew in the days prior to the Church
- So now Paul explains exactly how these gifts function to create unity, beginning in v.11

**[Eph. 4:11](#)** And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

**[Eph. 4:12](#)** for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

**[Eph. 4:13](#)** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

- In this passage we find one of three lists of spiritual gifts found in the New Testament
  - All three lists are written by Paul
    - In addition to the one here, we have lists in 1 Corinthians and in Romans
    - All three lists differ at least a little from one another
  - And the context of each passage makes clear Paul provided these lists as examples to make a larger point
    - Each list of examples support a different perspective on spiritual gifts
    - In 1 Corinthians, Paul was explaining the proper regulation of gifts within the corporate gathering
    - In Romans, Paul explains the proper attitude toward spiritual gifts in the body

- And here in Ephesians, Paul explains the purpose of gifts in the body
- Therefore, Paul's lists were not intended to be comprehensive inventories of spiritual gifts
  - In fact, there is no list of all spiritual gifts in the Bible
  - Even if we were to combine all three of Paul's lists, we still wouldn't have a complete list of gifts available within the body
  - Furthermore, some spiritual gifts in Paul's lists are no longer present in the body
  - While others are only available under certain circumstances
  - So let's keep an open mind about God's potential to gift members of the body yet remain grounded by scripture
- Turning to the details, Paul is explaining the central purpose of spiritual gifts in the body of Christ
  - But he begins with three important words: He gave some
    - These three words each have theological importance
    - And if we overlook them, we're likely to come to wrong conclusions about spiritual gifts
  - The first word is He
    - Obviously, that pronoun refers to Christ, as it refers back to the person in v.10 who descended and then ascended
    - Christ is the One in charge of spiritual gifts
  - Spiritual gifts aren't under our control or the control of another person like a pastor
    - In 1 Corinthians Paul teaches that spiritual gifts are according to the will of God
    - So the Bible teaches consistently that Christ forever remains in control of spiritual gifts
- Which brings us to the second word...gave
  - Christ gave us our spiritual gift

- We didn't lobby for it, request it or earn it
- God made a sovereign choice to equip us a certain way
- You noticed that the first gift on Paul's list is that of apostle, and of course we know this was Paul's spiritual gift
  - But do you remember how Paul obtained his gift?
  - According to Acts, Paul received his gift in the same moment the Lord brought Paul to faith
  - It's obvious, the Lord already had Paul's gift in mind before Paul even knew Him
  - So Christ gave Paul the gift of apostle, and there was never a point when the Lord asked Paul what he wanted
  - Just as Paul had no choice in joining the body of Christ, he had no choice in the gift he would receive
- Similarly, your gift was appointed for you at the moment of your faith
  - Most of us don't receive a clear word from the Lord concerning our gift
  - So we must come to know our gift through experience and trial and error
  - Nevertheless, you received a Christ-given, Spirit-enabled ability to serve the body of Christ
  - And it came to you at the moment you believed
- Finally, Paul says some...
  - Everyone in the body of Christ receives a spiritual gift according to the will of God
    - But we don't all receive the *same* gift
    - Paul says that the Lord gave "some" to be apostle, some to be prophet, etc.
    - Meaning God doesn't give everyone in the body of Christ a common spiritual gift
  - So taken together these three words establish our theological understanding of how spiritual gifts come to the body

- Christ selects and controls the gifts each believer receives
- He delivers the gift to us by means of His Spirit at the moment of our faith according to His will
- And He diversifies gifts within the body by assigning different gifts to different people
- There is no common spiritual gift that all believers share
- You may encounter some who teach that certain spiritual gifts lie within our grasp
  - That every believer can obtain these gifts either by praying for them, mimicking someone else or learning them ourselves
  - This teaching presumes that spiritual gifts are handed out continuously by Christ in response to our petitions
  - And they may even claim that every believer must demonstrate a common spiritual gift or they aren't truly saved
  - But as you can see, the opening words of this passage (among other scripture) denies this teaching plainly
- Turning to Paul's short list of gifts, this list is unique compared to the other two
  - His list emphasizes those spiritual gifts key to unity in the body
    - These are some of the most important gifts God can give
    - And for that reason, they are commonly associated with leadership roles
    - But with the exception of the gift of apostle, these gifts are not automatically offices in the body
    - They are spiritual abilities that may or may not lead to a leadership position in the church
  - The one exception is the gift of apostle
    - The word apostle means "one sent with a message"
    - It refers to being the first to bring the Good News into a place
  - Apostles were the men appointed by Christ to bring the message of the Messiah to the world in the first century

- They had a uniquely difficult mission
- They traveled into areas of the world preaching a Jewish Messiah and the opportunity for Gentiles to know Him
- They entered into cultures that knew nothing and cared even less about Jewish teachings of a Messiah
- In fact, many of these cultures were hostile toward the teachings of Judaism
- Even worse, these men preached without the benefit of 2,000 years of church history supporting their claims
  - There was no New Testament scripture, and no one had heard of Jesus
  - They had no allies waiting to receive them
  - And enemies followed them everywhere
- Under these circumstances, an ordinary evangelist wouldn't have stood a chance
  - So the Lord equipped certain men in special ways to reach the world and establish the church
    - The gift of apostle included two key qualities
    - First, these men were given supernatural insight into the word of God
    - They received supernatural understanding of Old Testament prophecies that had long alluded others
    - And they received new revelation from God, which eventually became the New Testament canon of scripture
  - Secondly, these men received authority to establish the church in unreached places and dictate proper church practice
    - Every apostle was appointed by Christ through a personal appearing, like Paul on the road to Damascus
    - Each one was a representative of Christ to the early church
    - Therefore, they had supreme authority over the flock

- And each man received supernatural abilities to demonstrate and validate their authority
  - In the Bible we see examples of these men performing supernatural healings, sometimes using nothing more than their shadow
  - They could pronounce a judgment against a believer and see that judgment carried out supernaturally even from a distance
  - They could be bitten by poisonous snakes and live
  - And they even raised the dead to life
  - These supernatural abilities were a part of how Jesus validated each apostle's right to teach and lead the church
- Therefore, apostle was the highest gift God gave to the church – but Jesus only gave it for a time
  - By the end of the first century, the church was well-established and the New Testament canon was complete
    - Therefore, the church had no more need for the office of apostle
    - So when the last apostle, the Apostle John, died near the end of the first century, the gift of apostle died with him
  - It's obvious how Jesus used the gift of apostle to bring unity to the early church
    - They unified the church through a common understanding of the creeds and doctrines of the faith
    - And by their authority they advanced the Good News around the world even as they protected the church from those who attacked the faith
    - It's fair to say that without apostles, the church would not have survived at all
- And as the last apostle died, the most powerful unifying gift shifted to the next gift on Paul's list
  - Even after the apostles were gone, prophets continued to guide the church in understanding the word of God

- The revelation of God was complete in apostles, but the early church still needed help to understand the meaning of scripture
- Remember, access to copies of scripture remained limited for many centuries
- And even literacy was not universal
- So God equipped some with a gift to relate scripture to the church
- We know the prophetic gift is different than the apostolic gift since it's listed separately here
  - But we also know the Apostles were prophets too, since they delivered the New Testament to the church
  - So what's the difference?
- The difference is the gift of prophecy doesn't involve revealing new scripture
  - Scripture itself says that no one may add or subtract from the words God gave to the final apostle, John
  - Therefore, the gift of prophecy provides supernatural understanding of God's word
  - A prophet will reveal the proper meaning of scripture to a generation where that understanding was lost (like during the Reformation)
  - Or a prophet may bring the knowledge of scripture to places where the word of God itself is restricted (like in China)
- So unlike the gift of apostle, prophecy may continue on even today
  - Particularly in areas of the world where access to God's word is limited, the Lord may move through prophets to bring a knowledge of Himself
  - Their prophetic speech doesn't add to scripture or compete with scripture
  - It echoes scripture by bringing it to life in the hearts of those who lack understanding or access to God's word otherwise
- Once again, it's easy to see how this gift promotes unity in the body

- Unity always begins with a correct understanding of God's word
  - The word of God is THE sanctifying, unifying force in the body of Christ
  - As Jesus Himself prayed to the Father on our behalf

[John 17:17](#) "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

[John 17:18](#) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

[John 17:19](#) "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

- The church is sanctified (made holy) and united by the truth
- So gifts that promote an understanding of God's word are of first importance in bringing unity to the body
- As we look at the rest of the list, we see this principle at work
  - The next gift is evangelist
    - The word in Greek means someone who brings glad tidings or good news
    - This gift involves more than merely witnessing Christ to the world
    - Anyone can evangelize, and in fact, everyone *should* evangelize to some degree
    - But the gift of evangelist is something beyond the norm
  - The gift of evangelism is a supernatural combination of courage, boldness, tactfulness and apologetics
    - This a potent and yet rare combination of skills, which is why it relies on a supernatural gifting
    - Someone with a gift of evangelism will initiate conversations about Christ when others couldn't find the courage
    - They will enter dangerous places without hesitation
    - They will endure persecution without backing down
  - And most importantly, they will bring a solid, biblical defense of Jesus to the world

- The gift of evangelism includes a supernatural ability to communicate the Good News accurately
- The person understands salvation by grace through faith inside and out
- They aren't necessarily scholars or even very well studied
- Instead, the Spirit in them gives them the defense they need to explain the truth accurately before kings and authorities
- Once more we can see how the Lord uses evangelists to unite the church
  - Evangelists unite us in mission and purpose
    - We see them moving and feel courage to follow
    - Together, they lead the church to new converts to strengthen our numbers
    - And they ensure that the growth of the church is set on a proper theological foundation
  - The gift of evangelist usually shows itself in style and results
    - A gifted evangelist is "wired" to talk about Jesus
    - If you or I stand in the checkout line at the grocery store, we think to ourselves, "I should mention Jesus to the clerk"
    - But usually the moment comes and goes and we leave the store having said nothing
  - Before the gifted evangelist leaves the checkout line, he's presented the Gospel, received a response and made an appointment for a baptism
    - He or she is bold, willing to speak
    - And having spoken, the Lord then brings great fruit
    - This gift is not a replacement for our individual efforts to witness Christ to the world
    - Instead, evangelists inspire and lead us in that work, creating unity in the accomplishment of the mission of the church
- Finally, Paul lists pastors and teachers, but in the Greek language the construct of this phrase suggests a single compound title

- So Paul seems to be talking about a single gift called pastor-teacher
  - In Romans Paul lists a gift of “teacher” without mentioning pastor
  - So it’s possible that there are separate gifts of pastor-teacher vs. just teacher
- But in my view, it’s not necessary or even possible to separate these gifts practically speaking
  - Biblically speaking, all pastors must be able to teach
  - And all teachers are engaged in shepherding the flock
  - So in my experience, the gift is pastor-teacher with some being given a greater ability for one aspect than the other
- Remember, these gifts are not the same as roles or positions of authority
  - A person with the gift of pastor-teacher is not necessarily an authority figure in the church
  - We receive our spiritual gift from the moment we are saved, but a person cannot become an authority in the church on Day 1
  - And some who have this gift never aspire to a leadership role
  - They serve as a Sunday School teacher or in some other way
  - Yet all the while they are shepherding God’s people through their skills of teaching, counseling and exhortation
- This final gift is obviously the most common among those in the list, and one that we still depend upon today
  - But notice how all these gifts center on building up the body of Christ through a knowledge of the word of God
    - Simply put, there is no substitute for unifying believers in their understanding of God’s word
    - We can’t truly be unified if we don’t share a common understanding of the truth
  - Unity is important, but unity is a means to a greater end
    - Notice in v.12 these gifts come to the church for the purpose of equipping you and me

- Paul says it was for the equipping of the saints
- Obviously, you and I are the saints who are to be equipped
  - And the word equipping can be translated training
  - So a primary reason we gather once a week is to be trained by those who possess these gifts
  - That's why Paul says elsewhere that the gathering is for believers, not unbelievers
- We come to the gathering expecting to be trained, to be built up as a body
  - At the end of v.12 Paul says our equipping should strengthen us corporately
    - Don't overlook that point
    - Christianity is a team sport
    - We must seek to be strengthened together such that if someone is dragging behind, we should close ranks to bring them along
  - Don't take personal satisfaction in your own knowledge of scripture if at the same time others around you remain ignorant
    - In particular, the gifts like pastor-teacher are supposed to identify any such discrepancies and address them
    - In that way, we can see even more clearly how pastor and teacher work together
    - It's similar to the way shepherding is a combination of leading and feeding a flock
    - A shepherd can't feed just some of the flock or lead just some... he must lead and feed all without losing any
  - And this must be our corporate goal as well, both old and young, new and mature Christians
    - We share a corporate responsibility to seek for this outcome
    - It's not merely the responsibility of the evangelist or pastor-teacher

- In fact, if a single person is doing too much of the heavy lifting for the church, the opportunity for others to be strengthened is lost
- One time, renown evangelist and preacher, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, was preaching and leading the worship choir in his church
  - After one service, a dear old lady came up to Chafer and said you are doing too much
  - You ought not have to preach and lead the worship choir also
  - So she said, “Why don’t you find someone else to preach?”
  - Since everyone has a stake in the outcome, everyone has a role in achieving that goal
- And we shall continue in this corporate pursuit until we arrive, Paul says
  - In v.13, Paul says we are seeking to attain to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God
    - He’s describing arriving at a faith equal to Christ’s faith
    - And a spiritual knowledge equal to Christ’s knowledge
    - Christ’s faith never doubted, never acted contrary to the will of God
    - And His knowledge of God’s word never failed so that He always had a proper response for the devil and his agents
  - Obviously, these goals are lofty, so Paul isn’t suggesting that we will become Christ’s equal this side of Heaven
    - Paul is simply setting the right goal, the high standard that we are all called to seek in a daily walk: Christ
    - Paul calls our goal attaining to the mature man
    - The Greek word translated mature is literally complete or perfect
  - That’s our true goal
    - We want to become as perfect or complete spiritually as we can
    - Through the training we receive from a unified body made possible by these gifts

- As we all seek to grow in these areas by setting our sights on Christ, then we will begin to move toward Him
  - And as each of us is doing the same things, equipped by the gifts of those in the body, we grow closer together
    - Our bond of unity grows stronger
    - A.W. Tozer described this process elegantly using an example of a room full of pianos
    - He said:

**Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same [tuning] fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. [Likewise,] one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to...turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship [in some other way].**

- That's our goal, Paul says...to measure up to the statue, to the height, of Christ's fullness and perfection
  - We are all called to strive for that standard individually
  - But we can only achieve it through the unity of the body of Christ
- Many Christians aren't even striving, and still others strive alone thinking they can make the trip alone
  - But the scriptures tell us something different
  - We all must strive to equal Christ in faith and knowledge
  - For that is the command of our Lord
  - It is what pleases Him and what allows us to accomplish the mission He gave us
- But we are to strive together, as a body, with the gifts of the body working to our advantage in that regard
  - So come to the gathering regularly
  - And come to be trained and to train others for the glory of Christ