

With our previous discussions in mind, let's bring this series to an end by turning our attention back to Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus. In Ephesians we see the importance of the body of Christ, the Church. Everything we have chewed over, for the last few weeks, has been preparation for the passage we are about to see in Ephesians 4:11-16. Our worldview, outlook on life and attitude towards each other will either aid or hinder Paul's challenge here.

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul addresses the unity of the body of Christ stating that Jew and Gentile have been brought together into one "new man", a new body, a new entity. In this new thing, we Gentiles, who were once far off, have been brought near. Both Jew and Gentiles, as unbelievers, were dead. But God, rich in mercy and because of His great love toward us, made us alive together, raised us together and seated us together with Christ, by grace through faith. The "together" is an experience that both Jew and Gentile believers share together with Christ. In this "new man", this new body, there is now reconciliation and peace.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul challenges us to live lives worthy of this great calling with which we were called into this one body, the church, by humbly bearing with each other in love. We do this by preserving the unity that the Spirit has made a reality through this new-found peace. This is in keeping with how our Triune God has called us, by one way, into this unity in one entity.

In Ephesians 4:7-10, we see how two members of that Trinity, a unity, acted in two different ways. The Spirit gave gifts to the believers and Christ gave gifted believers as gifts to the church. Within the Trinity we see unity, one God, but also the unique ways in which each member works, never contradicting each other but working in perfect harmony; three that are one.

Ephesians 4:8-10, building on Psalm 68, pictures a victory procession where the triumphant Christ gives His captives to His people. These few verses are an amazing picture of Christ taking captives, as spoils of war, from the army of His enemy, Satan. These captives were then given by Christ as "gifts to men". Now there is an image for you. You were taken by Christ as a captive in the war against the enemy. What did He do with you as His captive, as part of the spoils of His conquest? He gave you as a gift to the church. That is your calling.

The fact that we are called to be part of the church carries with it the idea that you are called for a specific task in the church. Christ as the head of the church has called you to a specific place in that body. There is a calling that is general, "be in the body", and a calling that is unique, "here's your place in it". They are not separate callings, but, "You! Come in and stand here! Hold this!". That place where you stand is made effective by the gift the Spirit gives you to fulfil that role; your part in the body of Christ. Two members of the Trinity, two distinct roles, but in perfect harmony working together to achieve a goal. That now prepares us for what Paul is about to say in Ephesians 4:11-16.

"And He Himself gave..." are the opening words. These words emphasise the person doing the giving in verse 11. Who is the He? Christ. Now who did He give to? To the church, the

body of Christ. It's important to catch this idea. You are a gift from Christ to the body of Christ. You are given to the body for a unique task. For you to carry out that tasks, to be the gift Christ gave you to be, the Holy Spirit empowers you with a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:11). What we have here in Ephesians 4 is not a list of spiritual gifts, but of some of Christ's gifts given to the church.

The uniqueness of your gift, and Christ's giving of you, cannot be overstated: you are Christ's gift to me as much as you are to the universal body of Christ. Now just how unique are you? Paul uses a similar Trinity formula in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit", many different spiritual gifts, but one Spirit who gives them. "There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord", those gifts are used in different kinds of ministries, no two are the same, but they were given by the same Lord, Jesus Christ. "And there are diversities of activities, but the same God who works all in all", the way these all play out are diverse and different, but they are still under one God. This highlights again the idea of diversity but still unity.

So, there are many spiritual gifts. Those many spiritual gifts are used in different types of ministry, given by Christ. Those many spiritual gifts, used in many different types of ministry then, logically, play out in an innumerable diversity of activities. But, they should all be in harmony, in oneness, as God is one. No two are alike but all work together as one. Catch that point; no two are alike. This is important. When you look around at the gifts Christ has seen fit to gift us with, the ministry of our fellow believers, we cannot measure them by our standard. They are Christ's gift to us and they are His servants. Before Christ they will stand or fall.

*"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand."* Romans 14:4

*"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ."* Romans 14:10

*"So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way."* Romans 14:12-13

You are uniquely a gift from Christ. Don't measure yourself by others' success or by the extent and type of their ministry. Be who you were created and given to be. Comparison only breeds anxiety and disunity. You fight, and you war, because you don't look like another. You judge them because they don't look like you. Bitterness and jealousy grow because you are measuring things all wrong. We are not all the same, we are unique.

Even after the resurrection of Christ, Peter had this problem. The resurrected Jesus, meeting the disciples by the sea of Galilee, revealed to Peter how he would die. But then said to him, "follow Me". What was Peter's response? Yes Lord, I'll willingly accept this plan, the path set before me? No.

*“Peter seeing him [John], said to Jesus, ‘But Lord, what about this man?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If I will that he remains till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.’” John 21:21-22*

Peter wanted to know what God’s plans were for someone else. He wanted a comparison between John’s path and his own. He was looking in the wrong place! Christ’s response was, “what is that to you, you just focus on how you follow Me.”

So, what are some of the gifts Christ gave? In Ephesians 4:11, Paul is mainly interested in a certain grouping. He has done this because he wants us to grasp how the body grows. Christ gave as gifts to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. There are four groupings here: First, apostles, second, prophets, third, evangelists and fourth, pastors and teachers. Each grouping had a unique way that it ministered to the church. Within each of those unique groups there were unique ways that individuals fulfilled those roles.

The fourth group is a good example. Paul places two ministries in this group; pastors and teachers. Now these are not the same and, no, the Greek does not say they are the same. Conflating this group to be “pastor-teacher” is a misunderstanding of the original language. Paul is merely saying that they are a part of the same grouping; those who teach and those who shepherd. Not all “good” teachers are “good” shepherds, and not all “good” shepherds are “good” teachers. A shepherded will do his job one way, a teacher another way. Even though they are Paul’s fourth group, we can easily see that the way they carry out the task at hand will differ, but they are still to be unified.

Paul’s point is that, even though Christ gave these four different groups, there is one main purpose; their part in the overall task at hand. Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints. What is their main task? Equipping the church. Will each group equip the church the same way? No. Will each individual in a specific group carry out the equipping in the same way? No. But there is still unity in this diversity. Don’t measure one by the other. In the same way, don’t measure yourself by another.

Why do these four groups equip the saints? So that the saints can carry out the work of ministry. The focus of the task at hand has now moved down from the four groups to the multitude. They now have a part to play. From a group of four to a sea of spiritual gifts, with their own ministries, carried out in their own activities. The gifts from Christ, mentioned first, breathe life, a call, into the sleeping masses. Those newly enlivened and awakened masses then set their hands to building up the body of Christ. The call in this passage is for the church to wake up and grow up together.

The common task we share is for us to “no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” but to rise together, as an army, a workforce “growing up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ” “by speaking the truth in love”. Christ is the one “from whom the whole body” can do its thing. What are we meant to be doing? Causing the growth of the body, you know, building it up. The way the body has been designed to grow is intended to produce a continual building up of itself in love. How can it do that? By

being “jointed and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share...”. Each part doing its share, and each other part seeing that part do its share, builds love. It’s equally true that if another part is struggling with its share then the part that sees it should act in love toward them, also building love.

Christ is the head of this new man, the head of this body. That’s a mature head on a baby body. The body needs to match up to the head. The goal is a mature head on a mature body. For that to happen the body needs to grow up. How will it do that? Through food and some exercise. Paul gives us that exercise regime here. Every part of the body working together in harmony and lovingly neutering each other as we grow together. Each joint, ligament, muscle and fibre of its being working in one accord. Each part doing its share. This causes growth into conformity with the mature head, and that growth causes a continual building up in love. The more we work together and see each other’s strengths and weaknesses, faults and flaws, successes and failures, the more we are to grow into a greater love. We begin to share the love God demonstrated toward us, through Christ, with our fellow members.

So, now we have the idea, right? The four groupings, in Ephesians 4:11, were given as gifts by Christ so that they can do all the work and everyone else can sit back and critique, correct? That will cause growth and that way of growing will produce love, right? No. They were given to ignite and sustain an enlivening of the masses, through their ministries and activities, so that the masses would move, breathe and pulse together, through their own ministries and activities. All parts are to work together, doing their share, carrying out their own tasks, causing this growth. This way of growing is what builds up love.

Here Paul has pictured the church as a body growing up into its mature head. In Ephesians 6, we saw Paul picture the church as an army properly arrayed for battle. Both images need something from you. You have to do something with what God has given you, what Christ has gifted you to the church to do and what the Spirit has empowered you for. The focus here is on you. You may be the smallest, least significant, least effective, “why am I even here” type of person in your own eyes. You may even be that in the eyes of others. But for Christ to gift you to the rest of us is no small thing. That means He saw value in you for something and that was something He wanted gifted to the church. But that goes both ways. Other believers are equally gifts.

Paul’s prayer for Philemon, in verse 6, is just as relevant for you. Namely that the participation of your faith may become more effective by acknowledging every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus. We are participating in God’s great building project. That’s what you were gifted to do. If you can’t see and acknowledge the good that is in you, found in you in Christ, you will never effectively take up the slack or the strain and do your share. Remember, that’s your share, not trying to be someone else or do someone else’s task. This requires you to embrace the you that you uniquely are in Christ. If the need arises to pick up another’s slack, the job needs done and they aren’t doing it, then it’s done through your God given skills. Don’t try to be them.

In this there can be so much cause for anxiety. But as we have seen, we need to embrace the journey that Christ has placed us on and cease wrestling with others. We have to be content with such as we have, and that includes our place in the body of Christ. We can't allow ourselves to become embittered, or jealous, with the path that others have been placed on, as we're not running in their lanes. We need to find a source of rejoicing in the Lord always. We need to be gentle with others and let everyone see it. We need to thankfully pray and allow God's peace to protect our hearts and our minds. We need to cease striving to be like others and rest in who we are in Christ; uniquely you.

It's only from this place that we can take up the equipment, built God-tough, to stand firm together in the evil day. Standing as a united army of God, in one body, each with our own places to stand, our own lanes to run in, our own part in the body. Always remembering in love, to yell up and down the lines, to call across the lanes, that we are all in this together. Constantly reminding yourself that what is good in you in Christ is also good in the other. Your struggles are shared by others. You cause as much anxiety in others as they do in you. Those who seem to have, struggle with the same discontent as you, and all that these wrestlings do is rob us of joy and peace.

If we are to stand up in our time and be seen, we need to make sure we are on the right path. As ambassadors of Christ we represent Him to the world. We represent Him to the world the unique way He created us to. What picture of Christ do we as individuals and a body paint for the world to see? Are we lovingly united, in harmony, at peace, growing up and filled with hope? Or are we at war, devouring each other? Yes, you may have to, from time to time, lovingly remind another gift that they are not living up to their calling. But, this should always be done with growth in mind. Not growing your own ego, or stature, or ministry but helping the growth of the other person; God's gift to you.

You are a gift. I am a gift. The rest of the body are all gifts. We are gifts for each other, given lovingly by Christ. We need to be reminded to accept these gifts because we know the giver. We will not all do the same thing the same way. We will not all carry out our calling in Christ the way someone else does. We will not all be as successful on the outside as others. But if we are running in our lane, standing in our patch of dirt, continuing on the journey we have been put on, then that is all that should matter. It is Christ who saw the potential in you, and it is to Him that we give account. From that place of acceptance and contentment we can reach out and lovingly encourage others. From the unifying of this rabble, the world will begin to see who Christ truly is and what He is capable of.