Christ’s Design for the Church  
Ephesians 4:11–16

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

I. Introduction

- Last time: Ephesians 3:10 The Wisdom of God through the Church  
- This time: Christ’s Design for the Church – the innerworkings

Let’s read Ephesians 4:11–16…

Main Idea: Christ designed the Church as essential for Christian growth by providing gifted leaders to equip the saints for ministry to one another.

Outline:
1. The Gifts for the Church (11)  
2. The Purpose of the Gifts (12–13)  
3. The Results of the Gifts (14–16)

Purpose: My prayer for us this morning is that Christ would use this passage to encourage us to continue in our pursuit of Him and the building up of one another in love.

I. The Gifts for the Church (11)  

\[11\text{And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,}\]

Verse 11 tells us that Christ has gifted the church with specific individuals or offices. He has called and empowered these leaders to establish the church through the ministry of the Word. Paul lists four leadership roles/offices commissioned with this task. The list isn't complete because we find elders and deacons mentioned elsewhere (cf. 1 Tim 3; Titus 1).

Apostle: “sent one” or “one who is sent.” They are understood to be an ambassador, representative, or messenger. In the NT, the biblical writers sometimes used the word of messengers sent out of the church. In 2 Cor 8:23, Titus is called a messenger [lit. apostle], and Phil 2:25, Epaphroditus is referred to as a messenger [lit. apostle].

But Paul isn’t referring to generic church messengers. He is referring to a specific role, a specific office, those who are apostles of Jesus Christ (e.g., Gal. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; Jude 17). These are men whom the Lord Jesus personally commissioned and authorized to be His representatives to lay the church’s foundation. This group included the twelve apostles.
(Matthias replacing Judas Iscariot in Acts 1:26) and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15–17; cf. 1 Cor. 15:7–9; 2 Cor. 11:5).

These official Apostles had to meet three qualifications: 1) They had to be chosen by Christ. 2) They needed to validate their mission and message with the signs of an apostle according to 2 Cor. 12:7. 3) They had to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. Paul makes it clear in 1 Cor 15:8 that he was the last individual to meet this qualification.

The Apostles were gifted to the church to minister and record Christ’s NT revelation. They were used to authoritatively establish the gospel and Christ’s instruction for the church. Jesus promised this to the 11 in the Upper Room in John 14–16 (John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:12–15). That is why the church is seen in Scripture to receive the apostles’ teaching, as well as recognize their writings as equal to the OT Scriptures (cf. Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 3:16).

**Prophet:** "one who speaks in the place of" or "a spokesman." This group of gifted leaders was the spokesmen for God yet did not have the authority or calling of an apostle (1 Cor. 12:28). The prophet's role in the church's foundation was to provide new revelation from God and divine interpretation of previously revealed truth.

A true prophet had moral integrity, and their message needed to be doctrinally sound and accurate. Sadly, both in the OT and the NT, there was the reality of false prophets. We see the repeated warnings in the NT against false prophets (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29–31; Jude 3–4) and the exhortation to test every prophet and their message according to Scripture (1 Cor. 14:29; 1 Thess. 5:20–22).

Now, as the apostle John completed the canon of the NT with the book of Revelation, the Apostolic and Prophetic office was no longer necessary (cf. Rev 22:18–19). Christ had a specific purpose for the Apostles and the Prophets. They were to lay the Scriptural foundation for the church. Paul mentions this in Eph 2:20, [God's household] "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone." Ephesians 3:5 says the mystery of the gospel "which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit."

Once they completed this work, apostles and prophets were no longer necessary gifts.

**Evangelists:** it’s important to clarify that all believers are commanded to proclaim the gospel to unbelievers (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). But some are particularly gifted as evangelists—God supernaturally skills these evangelists at reaching lost sinners with the message of Christ. I was able to personally witness some of our gifted evangelists at the Winter Wonderland outreach last December.
Evangelism is a vital ministry in every local church. Gifted evangelists proclaim the good news of salvation through faith in Christ alone to everyone and anyone. Their motivation is the knowledge that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). As God graciously draws His people to Christ through the gospel message, evangelists labor to see new converts baptized, discipled, and incorporated into the local church.

Evangelists contribute to this crucial ministry of the church by equipping other believers to grow in their ability to share the gospel. By their example, the local church is encouraged to greater measures of faithfulness in proclaiming the gospel.

Pastors and Teachers: Commentators are split on this, but it appears the best interpretation is to take these as two aspects of the single office of a pastor. The word here for “pastors” can also be translated as “shepherd.” Jesus is the Good Shepherd who has gifted the church with undershepherds to watch over, care for, and feed His sheep. This word describes the leadership, protection, and care pastors show towards the brothers and sisters God entrusted to them.

Human teachers are a part of Christ’s design for the church. Their calling is to explain and apply God’s Word so that people can hear it, understand it, believe it, and live it. Pastors are to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4). They desire to “Proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that [they] may present every man complete in Christ” (Col 1:28). And so pastors labor in prayer and study to teach and exhort believers to live a life conforming to the truth.

Pastors-teachers must be diligent in presenting themselves as approved to God and unashamed workers, rightly handling the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15). The warning of James 3:1 should cause us to tremble, “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.”

Christ gave the church gifted pastors-teachers for consistent, sound, biblical teaching. Pastors are not event coordinators or program producers. The calling is to lovingly lead, nourish, protect, and provide spiritual care to the body.

In summary, Christ has given the church uniquely gifted leaders. Two have completed their purpose: apostles and prophets. The remaining two are still functioning in the church today. They have been called and gifted for a purpose. This is according to Christ’s design, and we will see it in our next point…

II. The Purpose of the Gifts (12–13)

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, 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.

Equipping
The purpose we find for these gifted roles is to equip believers for the work of ministry. These skilled leaders are to invest in developing and preparing other believers to engage in the ministry within the body. What’s important to notice here is that these leaders don’t do the work of ministry alone while the rest of the believers passively or apathetically attend church. Instead, each Christian is called to actively serve/minister in the ways the Holy Spirit has gifted them. The picture is not of professional pastors doing all the ministry while everyone else is merely a consumer. Instead, the church is like a body, with each member contributing their vital role and function to the whole.

- Illustration of Community Groups

Building Up
As we repeatedly saw in the first point, the primary way these leaders equip the saints is through the ministry of the Word and prayer. When the church does this, it fulfills the second aspect of the intended purpose which is building up the body of Christ. The meaning of the word “building up” refers to the building of a house. Paul isn’t talking about numerical growth, but spiritual growth. As Christians grow in their knowledge of Scripture and practice of prayer, they grow in their ability to apply and minister Scripture and pray for others. There is this corporate cultivation of dependence on Christ through His Word and prayer.

Unity of the Faith/Knowledge of the Son of God
The church is to be growing in the unity of faith. This is not a reference to the act of believing but instead to the complete collection of Christian doctrine that Scripture lays out. Spiritual immaturity is often the byproduct of doctrinal ignorance. We can’t obey or believe what we don’t know. But as our minds are renewed by Scripture, we can reject worldly, sinful thinking and actions, and embrace God’s way for living.

Our faith is built on a proper knowledge of Christ. Paul uses the expression here “Son of God” to emphasize the knowledge of Jesus as risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, currently seated at the right hand of God, the only Lord and Head of the church.

What Paul is communicating is that there is one unified proper understanding of Christ and essential doctrines of the faith. Again, this proper understanding is revealed in Scripture alone. If we get Jesus wrong, we get the gospel wrong. If we compromise His deity, we don’t have the biblical Jesus. If we compromise His humanity, we don’t have the biblical Jesus. If we reject His resurrection, we don’t have the biblical Jesus. These are just some of the issues that we see the Apostles addressing in the NT.

In understanding more of Christ, His person and work, the church beholds more of His glory. It is in knowing more of Christ that we become more like Christ.

Maturity/Christlikeness
If we are growing in a proper knowledge of Him than in turn we are maturing and becoming more like Him. The growth here he talks about is a cooperate growth. Again, because we can be so individualistic we can think that our growth in merely personal terms. What Paul is describing here is growth of the church. What we need to understand is that by Christ’s design, we have a responsibility towards one another to grow and encourage growth in one another.

The cornerstone of the design for the church is Christ. Paul presents Christlikeness as the objective of this purpose. This goal is the glorious purpose of the church. When Christ redeemed us, the plan wasn’t just for us to be free from the penalty of sin. He is doing transformative work in His people.

Rom 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

2 Cor 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

Galatians 4:19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—

1 John 2:5–6 By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Jesus has designed the church for all believers to grow and reflect His character and likeness in their lives. Although this transformation will not be complete until Christ returns, believers are called to pursue this goal relentlessly. Christ wants us to become like Him in blamelessness, holiness, and perfection. Thus, the gifted leaders of the church must do all they can to facilitate this growth to maturity.

The purpose of the gifts is the produce growth. When saints are equipped they grow. They grow in doctrine, they grow in maturity, and they grow in Christlikeness. This all leads to the intended results of the gifts…

III. The Results of the Gifts (14–16)

**Protective**

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

Children: “one who does not talk.” When you consider a young child, as much as they are a gift from the Lord, you recognize how undeveloped they are. Gullible, naïve, and inexperienced. Things that would be “common sense” to an adult are unknown to a toddler. In
the same way, spiritual children are in constant danger of falling into false teaching and wrong interpretations of Scripture.

**Tossed by waves and carried by wind:** Underdeveloped Christians, lacking a thorough knowledge of God’s Word, are pictured here as unstable. They are tossed back and forth, believing anything that sounds somewhat good. The winds of any smooth-sounding teaching carry them away. Christians unwillingly or willingly fall to all sorts of false teaching: Materialism (Possessions); Pragmatism (Do What Works); Modern Humanism (Man is the Center); Syncretism (Blend Religions); Politicism (Politics is Religion); Scientism (Science over Scripture); Experientialism (Experience over Scripture).

**Trickery of men, craftiness in deceitful scheming:** Here, we see that these lies that exist throughout the world today are not morally neutral. They reside in sinful, unbelieving hearts and ultimately find their source in the father of lies “did God really say?” The word “trickery” comes from loaded dice used to hustle gullible gamblers. “Craftiness” carries the idea of clever manipulation of a lie made to look like truth. The word “scheming” is the same word to describe the schemes of the devil mentioned in (6:11). This refers to deliberate, planned, subtle, methodical falsehood.
These false teachings are malicious, and a part of a comprehensive strategy intended to lead people away from the gospel’s truth. A defensive and offensive plan of action against these lies is what spiritual warfare is. Lord willing, we will talk more about this when I teach at the end of July.

- Jesus being Tempted by Satan

Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right. ~ C. H. Spurgeon

Our corporate growth in discernment is a byproduct of what we see in the next verses…

**Constructive**

15but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

**Speaking truth in love, building up in love:** Speaking the truth encompasses more than our speech, it also entails one’s conduct. It encompasses a comprehensive embrace of truth. Everything we do must be in agreement with the truth. Christian’s need to know truth intellectually and affectionately. In other words, truth is not just a set of facts that we memorize; it’s the words of our heavenly Father that permeate our hearts and transform our lives. We are to believe the truth and the truth compels us to devote our lives to loving service of other members of the body of Christ.

Love is a communal quality. Love cannot be demonstrated in isolation. Christ designed the church for believers to live together as brothers and sisters in a family. I mentioned this already, but due to our hyper-individualistic thinking we tend to think of our faith as personal, individual, and solitary. It is true that we are individual people, but if we take this to the extreme we neglect the corporate aspect of the church.

(Am I my brother’s keeper?)

John Calvin gives a somewhat humorous image of this kind of thinking, “That man is mistaken who desires his own separate spiritual growth. For what would it profit a leg or an arm if it grew to an enormous size?”

- Illustration: Bicep
Whole Body, Every Joint, Each Individual Part: The mark of a healthy church is when every member uses the grace of God given to them to actively minister to the whole. Christ, in His victory, has granted to each believer grace gifts intended to be used for the building up of His people. This is important for us to understand because in our day there is consumer mentality present in the church. “I attend on Sundays, as long as I don’t have something more important happening, and that’s my contribution. The church is there to serve me, if and when I need it.”

People attend churches and don’t pray for them, they don’t use their gifts to minister in them, they don’t make an effort to know the members of that church. The picture Paul gives here is so much more glorious. It is an image of a body, with every part, every role working and contributing to the health and wellbeing of the whole. Where each member is motivated by the love of Christ to build up Christ’s body in love.

This is how Christ has designed the church to grow. Oure gifts are different, or roles vary, but we all have been called to collectively contribute to the growth of one another.