

PREFACE

Although, in a sense, vv28-30 continue from what Paul wrote in v27—i.e., *You all, collectively, are Christ's body, and individually members of it, and here are examples of how some of the individuals in the body serve it.*

More specifically, however, this passage before us today returns to his argument for a unified church by means of a diversity of Spirit-gifts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14, 18-20.

Let's include our verse from last week as we read the text for this study.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:27-30.

v28A

And God has appointed in the church,

Paul reiterates that it is God Himself (*theos*) who determines how the various Spirit-gifts are apportioned in the church local. And once again the apostle highlights those gifts that pertain to the *internal* workings of the body; there are other gifts that come out of the church but are—or can be—effective in the outside world, such as “various ministries” (12:5), giving, showing mercy (Romans 12:8), evangelism (Ephesians 4:11). Here, however, as in the list earlier in this chapter, the focus is on edifying those in the body.

Most of our versions use the word “appointed” to describe what God has done. The earlier NIV has “placed,” and the earlier KJV has “set,” both of which are more literal translations. The word (*etheto*) means to set something down, to install, or lay down. Vincent points out that the use of the middle voice in this verb implies that God is doing this “for His own use.”

Here is the clash of opposing worldviews. To those outside the body, those whose feet are stuck in the mud and mire of this earth and its culture, this is utter foolishness. According to their worldview,

- when Linda and I moved back to Iowa and spent considerable time finding a Realtor and then touring a number of properties, we were the ones who decided to purchase our present home, and it was *our* hard-earned money that paid the price;
- when we subsequently erected a barn on our property, building it from scratch, it was *our* labor and sweat, *our* money that did it all;

- and much later, when we were looking for a new church, and our doctor recommended a country church in Martensdale, we were the ones who made the decision to make it our spiritual home.

The Christian worldview, however, sees it differently: God was in charge of every step along the way. Thus we can thank Him for the land and house that is now our home—in fact it is not ours at all, but His; we are just its stewards. Thus we can look at our barn and give God the praise for it. Thus we can know with confidence that we were not the ones who chose to become a part of MCC, but in fact it was *God* who chose *us* for that. And, with variation of course, this process is repeated in the lives of every one of us. Why? Because we all serve Him; He is our Lord. And everything we are and have has come *from* and *for* Him. Ultimately, before everything else in our lives—yes, even family—we are each of us here for His use, and for His glory.

v28b

first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

To that end he has apportioned various Spirit-gifts that are to be employed in that service. It is not readily apparent in some of our versions, but Paul's emphasis here—especially after the first three—is not on the individuals, but on the gifts and deeds.

Gordon Fee: [Paul] lists gifts and deeds, not persons. That probably suggests that the first three items are not to be thought of as “offices” held by certain “persons” in the local church, but rather as “ministries” that find expression in various persons; likewise the following “gifts” are not expressed in the church apart from persons, but are first of all gracious endowments of the Spirit, given to various persons in the church for its mutual up-building.

first apostles, second prophets, third teachers,

At least the first three gifts that have been “appointed” or “placed” in the church seem to be ranked: first, second, and third. There are various opinions on this, but what seems to track best is that it is not so much to rank them by level of importance, or necessarily by order of authority, but this represents a ranking of “precedence in the founding and building up of the local assembly” (Fee).

The **apostles** (witnesses to the resurrected Christ, specially called out by God) are the ones who founded each local body of believers; **prophets** (which could also have been the founding apostle) would then, especially in the early days of the church, speak to God's people under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; **teachers** would instruct and inform the church by more normal means—i.e., not supernaturally by means of the Spirit.

prophets

Let me add just a few words about prophets (*prophetas*). I would suggest that it is disappointing that we do not have more “prophets” today. To refresh our memories about what Paul means by “prophetic utterances” (1 [Thessalonians 5:20](#)), let me quote from our study of v10 of this chapter.

As implemented in the early church, [prophecy] was far less about foretelling the future...than that of bringing an edifying, encouraging word from God by means of the Spirit. And since all believers now had the Spirit within, everyone was equipped with the means to do this, if God so willed.

Read Romans 8:5-6.

Read Galatians 5:22-25.

Prophesying is one mark of the spiritual person—the person walking by the Spirit rather than the flesh. The one whose mind is more often than not set on things above will be more accustomed to hearing the Holy Spirit’s counsel. And the one in the habit of *hearing* that counsel, will be more available to *speak* it.

There should be more prophets today, because more of us should be walking by the Spirit rather than the flesh.

teachers

This is the apostle’s first mention of this ministry in his extant letters; he will subsequently include it in Romans 12:7 and Ephesians 4:11. The primary difference between prophets and teachers, is that prophets speak extemporaneously, moved by the Spirit, while teachers (*didaskalous*) typically *prepare* before speaking. Each can, at times, be both, but if you have studied beforehand, written down or memorized the words, that is teaching, not prophesying.

In one hundred twenty six session of this study I do not think I have referenced the commentary by W. Harold Mare (in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*), but on this verse he offers an interesting thought.

Mare: The office of apostle was all-encompassing, including the gifts of prophecy, teaching, miracles, and the rest. But the prophetic gift did not include apostolicity, though it did include teaching. The teacher class did not compare, per se, with that of apostles or prophets.

...then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.

It is possible that Paul meant to prioritize, or rank, the rest of the Spirit-gifts in v28, and just wearied of using the numbers. The consensus seems to be that he ranks the first three, but adds the rest in an unordered fashion.

miracles and healings

These two gifts were included in the previous list in vv8-10—but they were in reversed order, which would seem to substantiate the position that after the first three in *this* list, there is no significance to the order. And note again: Paul’s emphasis is not on the individuals who have these gifts, but simply on the presence of the gifts in the body (Fee).

It is noted by Fee that by using the plural form (gifts, healings), Paul suggests that this was not a permanent gift, but that each occurrence of healing is a “gift” in its own right. That is, by this he means that someone would not become a “healer,” empowered by the Spirit to heal anyone and everyone. Nevertheless, healing was a signifying sign of Christ Jesus’ deity, and of the true apostles.

The gifts of healing and miracles go together like the gifts of wisdom and knowledge; that is, the line of distinction between them is blurred. The “effecting [or working] of miracles” (*energema dynameon*) seems to apply to any “actualization of God’s power in mighty deeds” (Garland) beyond healing.

helps

This is the only place in the NT where the gift of “helps” is mentioned by that name, but we can consider it a close relative to those mentioned in Romans of service, giving, and showing mercy.

Read Romans 12:6-8.

This, in my opinion, is one of the most important and most precious gifts in the body of Christ. It is also one of the hallmarks of a healthy church. David Guzik passes along how Charles Haddon Spurgeon described the qualities of someone who has been given the Spirit-gift of helps:

1. A tender heart to really care.
2. A quick eye to see the need.
3. A quick foot to get to the needy.
4. A loving face to cheer them and bless them.
5. A firm foot so you will not fall yourself.
6. A strong hand to grip the needy with.
7. A bent back to reach the man.

“Helps (*antilempseis*) is an especially beautiful word meaning to take the burden off someone else and place it on oneself” (MacArthur).

administrations

This gift, also, is new to the lists, and, according to Fee, some of the translations of this word are unfortunate and misleading—including in the NASB. It is translated administrations^{nasb, niv, nkjv}, governments^{kjv}. He claims that a better translation is represented by the NIV2011: “guidance”, because (according to Fee) Paul intends something like “acts of guidance, giving wise counsel to the community as a whole, not simply to other individuals.”

The cognate of the word (*kyberneseis*) means to steer or pilot a ship, and since I am ill-equipped to judge either way, I will simply point out that most translations and commentators interpret this to refer to the gift of administering or guiding the body, making decisions for the direction it should go—e.g., as does a board of elders.

various kinds of tongues

Some opine that Paul lists “various kinds of tongues” last to make the point that he considers it the least important of the gifts. Perhaps. Others (e.g., Fee) claim it is the last gift mentioned because it was the big problem in Corinth.

w29-30

All are not apostles, are they? All are not...

Paul closes by reiterating his primary point that the church is not—indeed *cannot* be—populated by individuals all having the same gift. In Corinth, as today in some churches, one is considered not a fully developed Christian—perhaps not even a true Christian with the indwelling Spirit—if one does not speak in tongues. Each of these rhetorical questions is to be answered with, “Of course not.”

In our next session we will transition from Paul’s detailed instruction on the unity of the body through the *diversity* of Spirit-gifts, to what Paul describes as the greatest, most essential component of all—the one essential that makes all the other gifts effective.

Love.