

## Unit III: The Church and Its Teachings

## Working Together Makes Us Better

DEVOTIONAL READING: Acts 2:42-47

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 4:26-32; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 1:15-23; 2:13-22; 4:4-6, 11-16; 5:22-27; 1 Timothy 3:15

PRINT PASSAGES: Mark 4:26-32; Ephesians 4:4-6, 11-16

## KEY VERSES

Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16, KJV)

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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. (Ephesians 4:15-16, NIV)

## Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Understand and compare how Paul explains spiritual gifts in his letters to different New Testament churches.
- Recognize and accept the spiritual gifts given by Christ.
- Pursue reconciliation within the church and between the church and the wider community.

## \*Key Terms

**Edifying** (Ephesians 4:16)—Greek: *oikodomé* (oykod-om-ay'): the building up; “builds . . . up” (NIV).

**Harvest** (Mark 4:29)—Greek: *therismos* (theris-mos'): a gathering or reaping; crop.

**Parable** (Mark 4:30)—Greek: *parabole* (parab-ol-ay'): a story with rich meaning; a proverb; a similitude; “comparison” (KJV).



## The Biblical Context

In Mark 4, Jesus was teaching by the Sea of Galilee when He shared two parables about how God's kingdom grows (Mark 4:26-32). He uses examples from farming—something the people who were listening were very familiar with—to show that God's work often starts small but grows in powerful and surprising ways. These stories gave hope to early followers, reminding them that even when they couldn't see everything happening, God was still at work, making His kingdom grow. The apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians while imprisoned in Rome, reflecting on the riches of God's grace, the unity of the church, and how believers should live out their faith in everyday life. Ephesians divides naturally into two major sections. Chapters 1–3 focus on theological truths—explaining the believer's salvation, unity in Christ, and God's eternal plan to bring everything together under Christ as the Head of the church. In chapters 4–6, Paul shifts to practical application, offering guidance on how Christians are to conduct themselves in relationships, the workplace, and spiritual warfare. A central theme woven throughout the letter is that both Jews and Gentiles now belong to one body in Christ because of His death and resurrection. As a result, Paul reminds believers that despite their differences, they are called to live in unity—joined by the same Spirit and united in the same purpose. After laying the theological foundation for unity, Paul makes an urgent and practical appeal to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1–6). He then shows how that unity is nurtured and strengthened through spiritual gifts and the equipping ministry of gifted leadership (Ephesians 4:11–16).

**Seed (Mark 4:26)**—Greek: *sporos* (spro'-os): a kernel that is planted to produce a plant; a sowing; symbolically, the Word of God.

**Sickle (Mark 4:29)**—Greek: *drepanon* (drep'-an-on): a pruning or gathering hook.

**Sleight (Ephesians 4:14)**—Greek: *kubeia* (koobi'-ah): trickery; deceit; “craftiness” (NIV).

**Sown (Mark 4:32)**—Greek: *speiró* (spi'-ro): “planted” (NIV) (seed); spread; scattered.

**\*Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2**

## Introduction

The significance of Christian unity is rooted in Jesus' teachings, particularly His prayer in John 17. Jesus prayed that His followers would be one—unified just as He and the Father are—so that the world would believe the Father sent Him and that He, Christ, loves His church (see John 17:21–23). The apostle Paul shares another reason for Christian unity in Romans 15:5–6—to glorify God with one voice. More importantly, when Christians are unified, sharing beliefs, values, and a common purpose, they manifest the divine unity characterizing the Trinity: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, there are challenges to achieving and maintaining unity among believers for several reasons. Some of those challenges include disagreements concerning theological differences, cultural and ethnic diversity, personal preferences over worship styles and cherished traditions, sin, fear of losing distinctive beliefs, and failure to understand

and prioritize the mission Christ gave His church (see Matthew 28:19–20). Despite these and other challenges, Christian unity is achievable to assist the church toward experiencing unity with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These “manifestations of the Spirit” were given by God to every genuine

believer to equip them for service and to work together harmoniously to build up the church, demonstrating the unity of believers as the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). Still, as Paul reminded the Ephesian believers, unity doesn't happen automatically. It requires intentional effort—a commitment to grow spiritually and to strive daily to achieve and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (see Ephesians 4:3).

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### Unity's Foundation (*Mark 4:26-32; Ephesians 4:4-6*)

#### KJV

26 And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27 And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

28 For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.

29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:

32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

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4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

#### NIV

26 He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground.

27 “Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.

28 “All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.

29 “As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

30 Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?

**31 “It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth.**

**32 “Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.”**

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**4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called;**

**5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;**

**6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

Jesus' kingdom parables (Mark 4:26-32) explain how God's kingdom, embodied by the church today, grows and what it represents. God's kingdom develops and continues through God's power, not human effort (Mark 4:26-29). Starting from a small seed (Mark 4:30-32), God sovereignly ensures its inclusivity and potential for growth. Jesus highlights that the growth of the kingdom is entirely God's work, and so is the church today. Now, however, God also provides the means for the church, the visible expression of His kingdom, to mature and stay unified—through spiritual leaders and gifts as described in Ephesians 4.

Paul shifts from teaching deep spiritual truths to giving practical advice on how to live out the Christian faith. He starts by calling believers to live in a way that reflects their calling in Christ, beginning with unity. This unity is shown through a series of “ones” that highlight how believers are meant to live in harmony.

In Ephesians 4:4, Paul mentions one body, one spirit, and one hope, explaining that the Holy Spirit is the source of this unity, bringing all believers together no matter which church they attend. He reminds us that all believers share the same hope—eternal life with Christ. In Ephesians 4:5, Paul lists three more “ones”:

- One Lord—Jesus Christ,
- One faith—the shared message of salvation,
- One baptism—both our public commitment to Christ and the Spirit's work in placing us into the family of God.

He ends in Ephesians 4:6 by declaring that there is one God and Father of all. This God is over everything, working through everything, and present in every believer. This powerful truth shows why unity in the church isn't just a good idea—it's essential. We all belong to the same spiritual family with the same heavenly Father.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How are Paul's seven “ones” relevant motivation for unity among believers?

## Unity's Provision (*Ephesians 4:11-13*)

### KJV

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

### NIV

11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

13 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.

Paul established the foundation for unity among all believers in the previous verses. In verses 11-13, he explains what God provided believers to assist in maintaining and sustaining the unity the Holy Spirit produces—a variety of spiritual leaders. It is significant to note that God appointed and empowered these leaders, meaning that they did not appoint themselves and were not self-directed. These gifted leaders included apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (verse 11). Evangelists shared the Good News, moving from place to place, building on the foundation the apostles and prophets laid. Some interpret pastors and teachers as two tasks of the same leadership office, indicating pastors' shepherding and teaching responsibilities. More importantly, these leaders were given a purpose: to equip believers for the work of ministry, to edify and develop the church spiritually, to bring about unity in the faith and the knowledge of Christ, and to guide believers toward ongoing spiritual maturity (verses 12-13). In summary, God's provision of spiritual leaders underscores His intentional design for a healthy, unified, and growing body of believers, each working together to reflect Christ and carry out His mission in the world.



### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what ways is the church accountable for honoring and following the spiritual leaders whom God appoints?

## Unity's Results (*Ephesians 4:14-16*)

### KJV

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

### NIV

14 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.

15 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.

16 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.

Paul outlines the benefit of believers' working together in unity using their spiritual gifts and following God-given spiritual leaders in verse 14: spiritual maturity that safeguards them from being misled by false doctrine. A spiritually united congregation—grounded in faith, characterized by mutual love, and committed to holding one another accountable—fosters both individual growth in Christ and collective spiritual development (verse 15). However, this unity and resulting maturity require every member to contribute, using their spiritual gifts cooperatively and in a spirit of love, a principle the church must embrace and put into practice (verse 16). In verses 17-18, Paul warns believers to reject the worldly lifestyle of the Gentiles, marked by spiritual ignorance and separation from God. Instead, they are to display a renewed mindset rooted in faith, truth, and righteousness, serving as a collective witness to the unity that defines Christ's body, the church.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What is the evidence that the church equips its members for ministry and maturity?

### A Closing Thought

Ephesians 4 begins Paul's transition from doctrine to its practical application by appealing to his audience to strive to diligently maintain the Spirit's unity. He explains that unity

is not self-made but Spirit-driven, demonstrated by spiritual disciplines and grounded in seven “ones”—one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism of the Spirit, and God (Ephesians 4:1-6). Paul connects unity with spiritual maturity and ministry developed by believers using their unique spiritual gifts. Supporting and following the gifted spiritual leaders God gives to the church emphasizes that unity matures as believers are equipped to serve harmoniously (Ephesians 4:11-18). The church grows spiritually and numerically when each member works, preserving and maturing its unity through love, humility, ministry, and spiritual growth.

## Your Life

One personal challenge in this lesson is to discover and use the spiritual gifts God gave you at salvation to help build unity and encourage growth in the church. Unity doesn’t happen automatically—it takes everyone’s doing their part. To find your gift, try using tools like prayerful discernment, Bible studies on spiritual gifts, spiritual gifts quizzes, advice and feedback from pastors or leaders, and getting involved in ministry. Once you know your gift, use it to help keep your church united through the power of the Holy Spirit. Blest be the ties that bind!

## Your World!

Paul connects the church’s unity with spiritual growth and service in Ephesians 4, emphasizing it as a theological reality, a spiritual gift, a visible testimony, and a practical responsibility of its members and leadership. This week in conjunction with others, consider assessing and evaluating your congregation’s efforts to promote and preserve unity, provide members with meaningful opportunities to discover and use their spiritual gifts for the body’s benefit, and encourage intentional spiritual growth. Prayerfully identify any attitudes, behaviors, or situations within your fellowship that hinder these vital sources for sustaining unity and healthy spiritual growth collectively.

## Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we are indebted to You for providing all we need to preserve and sustain unity within the church, Christ’s body. In gratitude, we commit to using our spiritual gifts and to obediently follow the gifted spiritual leaders You give to promote the spiritual growth and effectiveness of Your church in our communities and beyond. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Conclusion

### (Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Next week’s lesson explores how the church’s essential ordinances—baptism and the Lord’s Supper—sustain and give vitality to its mission and witness to God’s salvation. Read Matthew 3:13-17; 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

# Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, February 2	“Saved through the Sea”	(Exodus 14:21-31)
TUESDAY, February 3	“Baptized into a New Life”	(Romans 6:1-14)
WEDNESDAY, February 4	“God Provides Bread in the Wilderness”	(Exodus 16:13-16, 31)
THURSDAY, February 5	“Jesus Is the Bread of Life”	(John 6:28-40)
FRIDAY, February 6	“A Blessing with Bread and Wine”	(Genesis 14:14-20)
SATURDAY, February 7	“Beloved Child of God”	(Matthew 3:13-17)
SUNDAY, February 8	“A Meal of Remembrance”	(1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

## Notes