

The Church – A Construction Zone

Ephesians 4:11-16

Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians and chapter 4 where we will take a look at the definitive chapter of the role of the body of Christ that is in harmony.

Ephesians 4:11-16

When the church is functioning as it should in the context of a growing relationship with Christ the people within the body of Christ will move from serve us to service, they will move from being impersonal within the community to impacting the community, they will put aside selfishness and become supportive of one another, and they will move from watching as a spectator to worshipping and working as an active participant.

From our study of this passage we will note three things about the church:

A divinely appointed position

A divinely encouraged preparation

A divinely organized purpose

From the outset of the message you need to know that the emphasis in the context is spiritual growth as a body rather than spiritual growth as an individual. We are all to contribute to a unified growth as we function in our giftedness.

Let's look first at a divinely appointed position.

I. A DIVINELY APPOINTED POSITION – v. 11

We need to understand first of all that there is a divine giver.

A. A Divine Giver

“It was He who gave...”

The “He” in the passage is of course speaking of the Lord. He is the one who has given gifts to the

church to help it function and grow as it should.

I Corinthians 12:4-8a, 11, 18 (purpose vs. 25-27)

Let's not ever think that spiritual gifts are natural to us, that we can somehow choose them at will or that we develop these gifts on our own. I Corinthians along with Ephesians 4:11 make it very clear that God directs the individual believer in the body with a specific gift and that these gifts are not for the benefit of the individual himself or herself but for the common good of the whole body.

Verse 7 says they are for the common good. **NLT “A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.”**

Verse 11 says they are given as the Spirit determines. **NLT “He alone decides which gift each person should have.”**

Verse 18 says that God has arranged the parts just as He wanted. I can't one day say that I don't want the gift I've been given and I want to trade it in for something different. God determined the need within the body and gave you the gift you have for the common good to serve others in the body. **NLT “He has put each part just where He wants it.”**

Verse 25 gives the purpose – so that there would be no division within the body in order to properly care for each other. **NLT “This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally.”**

I am concerned when I hear someone tell me that they are a Christian but they don't attend any church because they don't need it. Somewhere along the way they were hurt by someone else in the church or they were disillusioned by the church as an organization and so they think they can worship God better on their own.

[Warren Wiersbe shares a story about a pastor friend of his who one day received a visit from a freelance](#)

missionary asking for money for his ministry. The pastor asked who he was associated with. The man said he belonged to the invisible church. The pastor asked what church he was a member of. Again the man answered that he was part of the invisible church. Suspicious, the pastor asked when this invisible church met and who the pastor was. The missionary was incensed at the questions and told the pastor that his church wasn't the real church and that the invisible church was. The pastor then replied that he would give him some invisible money to help the invisible church.

Ephesians 4 is a compelling passage to say that every believer is important to the body of Christ and has a function within the body and therefore needs to be involved in a local church. I feel like telling the person who doesn't think they need to participate in a church to give me one of their arms or legs. Certainly they should be able to get along just fine without it. While people learn to adapt without limbs, the physical body functions best when all parts are working together. It's the same with the body of Christ. We can adapt if someone isn't exercising their spiritual gift but the church body functions best when everyone is engaged and working together. God is the one who gave you that gift to use. You have a purpose. Let's never forget that. He is the divine giver. We must also keep in mind that every spiritual gift not only is divinely given but the individual is divinely enabled or empowered to do the work for service to the church.

That He gave these gifts also implies His sovereign control and His sovereign choice in the matter of His authority over the church. It is for our good and His glory.

In the context of our passage what gifts then did He give the church? Notice the divine gifts.

B. The Divine Gifts

To help the church grow God gave four essential gifts. Two I believe have ceased and two continue today. These all are gifted people to the church.

1. The Apostles

An apostle was one sent with a message. In the technical sense it is speaking specifically of the 12 apostles. This group would include Matthias as the replacement for Judas and Paul who was also an apostle (**Galatians 1:1**).

In a general sense it also refers to other men noted in the New Testament who were called apostles. In **II Corinthians 8:23** Paul is speaking about messengers of Christ and in the Greek the word for messenger is apostolos or apostle.

In **Galatians 1:19** James the brother of Jesus was referred to as an apostle.

In **Acts 14:4, 14** Barnabas is called an apostle. As Paul concludes his letter to the Romans he requests greetings be sent to Andronicus and Junias who were **“outstanding among the apostles.”** Silas, Timothy and Apollos were also called apostles (**I Thes. 1:1; 2:7; I Cor. 4:6, 9**)

An apostle, whether in the technical sense or the general sense carried the gospel message with God's authority as His official representative.

I believe this office ended when John, the last living apostle of the Lord, died on Patmos. Nowhere in the New Testament with the exception of Matthias in Acts 1 do you see or hear about any of the apostles being replaced when they died. Their function as the foundation of the church was complete and the office, the gift was no longer needed.

2. The Prophet

They were to provide edification, exhortation and comfort to the church. (**I Corinthians 14:3**) With the canon of Scripture incomplete their role was to hear from God and provide direction to His will. He proclaimed the Word of God and was given particular insight into doctrines of the faith.

(Ephesians 3:5) They spoke a revelation from the Lord; expounded on revelation already given; and always spoke for God. While the apostle's message was general and doctrinal, the prophet's message was personal and practical.

There were three basic responsibilities apostles and prophets had in the early church.

According to **Ephesians 2:20** they were to lay the foundation of the church.

According to **Ephesians 3:5** they were to receive and declare revelation of God's Word.

According to **II Corinthians 12:12** they were to give confirmation of God's Word through **"signs, wonders and miracles."** These substantiated the validity of what was proclaimed by them as truth. With the completion of Scripture their office as well ended. Like the Apostles, they were gifts to the early church to help it grow.

3. The Evangelist

These gifted men were engaged in spreading the gospel. Evangelists would be like our modern missionaries. They reached out to the lost with the gospel. Paul was an evangelist as was Philip. We see him along a dusty road proclaiming the truths of the gospel to the Ethiopian Eunuch who was curious about a text in Isaiah.

4. The Pastor/Teacher

This was one individual with two unique functions. On one hand he was a pastor. In the Greek it's the word *poimenos* and defined someone who took care of sheep. The intent of the word is someone who provides care for another, in this case spiritual care. His role is to provide comfort and guidance to people in the church as they journeyed along life's road.

As a care giver at times he counsels, at times he comforts, and at times he corrects. He embodies the qualities of a shepherd. The root word for shepherd means to protect. Jesus said that the good shepherd lays down his life for the flock (**John 10:11**). As

the shepherd pastor he must protect the flock from adversaries that would seek to take some from the flock by false teaching or worldly influence.

This individual is also a teacher who instructs the church in godly living.

I Peter 5:1-4

He is to oversee the affairs of the church.

He is to preach and teach by dealing with doctrine and proclaiming the truth.

He is to exhort the church. The word in the Greek is *parakaleo* and means to call near. It is akin to *paraklete* used of the Holy Spirit who is our comforter and means to come along side of. The pastor earnestly advises and warns with strong admonition.

He does this by persuasion – **Acts 2:14; 14:22**

He does this by pleading – **II Corinthians 8:17**

He does this by comforting – **I Thessalonians 2:11**

He does this by encouraging – **I Thessalonians 4:1**

He does this with doctrine – **II Timothy 4:2**

He is also to be a prayer partner for the needy -

James 5:14

He shepherds – **Acts 20:28**

These individuals were gifts to the church given by the divine gift giver.

For what purpose though were these given? Verses 12-13 tell us they were for divinely encouraging preparation.

II. DIVINELY ENCOURAGING PREPARATION – v. 12-13

The crux of the matter is evident in the very first part of the verse – **"to prepare God's people."**

Our role is to prepare you, but prepare you for what? I see three things.

A. To Prepare You for Service – v. 12a

As God's gift and servant to the church I am to prepare you for **"works of service."** That simply

means that I am to equip you to serve. Service implies activity or action on your part. The word used in the KJV is the word perfecting and has the idea of furnishing or equipping you with something. I am to equip you with the tools you need to serve one another.

If I hired you to make fudge, I would equip you with the tools and the ingredients to make fudge. If I hired you as a basketball coach, I would equip you with basketballs and a court on which to practice with the team.

If I hired you to clean rooms in my motel, I would equip you with clean sheets and towels and various cleaners to dust and mop.

As your pastor I am to equip YOU to do the work of serving.

Now I want to be as gentle but as firm as I can in what I am about to say. Church is not to be a place for spectators where some people do all the work while the rest watch. Each person, young and old alike, has a role within the church. There should be no retirement parties for Christian service to the body of Christ. If you are not actively engaged in serving the body of Christ in some way then either I am not doing my job to equip you or you are being disobedient to the Lord. I can understand if you are a new Christian and not sure where you fit in or what you can do. Remember that everyone has a spiritual gift to help the body in some way.

Ephesians 2:10 says that God has prepared good works for you to do. I am to minister the Word of God to you in such a way that you are trained and ready to get involved in ministering to others.

*****II Timothy 3:16-17*****

There is to be what one author wrote regarding this passage “**wholehearted participation.**”

Some of you may be doing too much.
Some of you may not be doing enough.
Some of you may not be doing anything.
Some of you have stepped up to the plate to get

involved.

You may think you don't have any gifts or skills. You may think that you have already done your bit for king and country.

You may think that you're too young or too old.

You may think that you don't have any time.

Jesus is calling us to a life of active service.

Luke 9:57-62

If you have ever seen a picture of an Amish barn raising, you notice that no one is standing around. They all have a role, they all know their role, and they all do their role.

I Corinthians 15:58 exhorts us to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

I Peter 4:10-11 “**Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.**” (Emphasis added)

We all have responsibility to the body, not just the pastor/teacher.

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson has said “No pastor has finished his work when the sheep fall so far short of the goal.”

John MacArthur writes “The surest road to a church's spiritual stagnation, to the Pastor's burn out, or to both is for the pastor to become so engulfed in activities and programs that he has too little time for prayer and study of the Word” and I will add with which he needs to feed the flock.

For many years the California coastal town of Monterey was a pelican's paradise. As the fisherman cleaned their fish, they flung the innards to the pelicans. The birds grew fat, lazy, and contented. After a time the fisherman left, and the pelicans grew gaunt and thin and starved to death

because they made no effort to fish for themselves. The problem of the pelicans was solved when they imported new pelicans from the south. They had been accustomed to foraging for themselves. They were placed among their starving cousins and the newcomers started catching fish. Before long the hungry pelicans followed suit and the fish famine was ended.

My doing the work you can be doing doesn't help you do the work of serving.

Now the passage goes on to say that there is a reason for this preparation time for service.

B. To Prepare You for Building Up the Body of Christ – v. 12b

Building up is twofold. One way we build up the body of Christ is by actively sharing the gospel and adding to the church new converts.

I have a little flier here that I'm going to pass out. I would like to schedule a seminar this spring on evangelism with a program titled "Becoming a Contagious Christian." It's 6 sessions and there are some choices on the flier.

You may want to meet on just one day.

You may want to meet on a couple days either Saturday or Sunday.

You may want to meet over 6 weeks on a weeknight.

We may offer it during Sunday School as an elective.

While the Lord gave to the body of Christ individuals especially gifted in evangelism, as we have learned over the course of past weeks we all have the responsibility to share Christ so that others can both hear about man's great sin and God's greater love.

We build up the body of Christ through evangelism. We build up the body of Christ through helping existing believers mature in their faith.

One of the things I constantly hear about the smaller group format for Sunday school is how everyone is participating in the discussion. Sharing with one another in those settings is essential to encourage and exhort each other to grow spiritually. If you don't attend Sunday school I would encourage you to get up an hour earlier and make an effort to be here to learn. Don't just rely on a 40 minute message to get spiritually nourished for the week.

According to **Acts 2:42-48** the early church met daily to be taught the Word of God. You may want to get involved in another small group Bible study. We build each other up through active involvement in the study of God's Word with one another.

C. To Prepare You for Unity in the Body of Christ – v. 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.”

The word “until” express not only the idea of duration that we continue in this activity until there is maturity, the word also implies purpose, the purpose being maturity.

Faith is in reference to their commonly held convictions about belief in Christ related to how an individual is saved, and the idea of those doctrines which concern Him.

Unity is the state of being one, singleness of purpose. It is more than just agreeing on the color of new carpet or voting unanimously on the new constitution. In the context it implies agreement in the basic doctrines of the church as taught by the Pastor/teacher from the Word of God. There are to be no divisions among you.

Ephesians 4:3

Romans 15:5-6

I Corinthians 1:10 – a huge problem here.

Unity is achieved as each member uses his or her spiritual gifts to help the church become more like Christ in character. If there is divisiveness within the body then the body isn't functioning together as it should and neither will we be able to grow spiritually. Unity in fellowship is impossible without a commonly held faith or truth.

What then is the purpose of growing up spiritually?

Verses 14-16 tell us about the divinely organized purpose.

III. THE DIVINELY ORGANIZED PURPOSE - v. 14-16

The first purpose we see that preparation provides is stability.

A. There is Stability – v. 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 men in their deceitful scheming.”

The word infant in the original isn't speaking of a toddler, the word is actually referring to a baby, someone totally incapable of taking care of himself. The contrast then between this verse and the previous verses has to do with maturity level. A Christian who is not maturing in their faith, who isn't engaged in active service, and who is not building others up is an infant. They are the ones tossed around back and forth on waves, blown around like a paper ship.

The past couple of weeks our newscasts were drawn to the plight of the Carnival cruise ship that broke down in the middle of the ocean. It was adrift and at the mercy of the tide and waves.

That is the picture of what Paul is trying to convey to the Ephesians that without maturity in Christ, an

individual is at the mercy of any false doctrine or teacher that comes along. Notice that he describes these false teachers as cunning and crafty, they deceitfully scheme. It is willful and intentional with the purpose of drawing many away from the true faith. The word cunning is the Greek word kubia from which we get our English word cube and is the word used for dice. Dice was commonly associated with trickery as they would be loaded to role the way the trickster wanted. Scheming has to do was something that is deliberately planned.

On the corner of the campus at Baptist College there was a small plot of land and a church that belonged to the Mormons. Many times the administration approached them about purchasing the property but they would not budge. They claimed that many of their converts to Mormonism came from Baptist background. They obviously had not been grounded in the faith and were easily persuaded, duped into following doctrinal error.

When we mature in Christ we won't be easy prey for false teachers because we will know the truth. A.T. Robertson “If we are not anchored by the full knowledge of Christ, folks are at the mercy of these squalls.”

Andrew Semenchuk has asked prayer for the Slavic churches on the west Coast because many of the new believers who have come from Slavic countries to America are facing for the first time false teachers. He is working to build them up in the faith

The Bereans were nobler than the Thessalonians because they searched the Scriptures. Those who stand on strong doctrine and sound teaching will not be led astray by the trickery of man or the schemes of the devil. There is stability in the body.

B. There is Sound Speech – v. 15

Being united in purpose and built up in faith by the Word of God, our speech, which also implies our

way of life, is done in love. Words and how we say them are so powerful. They have the power to build up or tear down. They have the power to embolden or cast fear. They can encourage or discourage. How you talk to others is a direct reflection on your relationship with Christ. There is an old saying that says the truth hurts. Paul is saying that if you must speak the truth, speak it in love. The intent of love is always to build up, never to tear someone down. When we speak the truth in love we demonstrate that we are submitting to Christ who is our head. In this way we all will be built up and become mature. I find it somewhat amusing to watch kids, even when they are grown up, who have the same mannerisms and style of speech as their parents. In effect Paul says we should speak just like our Father. When we model the Lord, there will be sound speech.

There is one final purpose noted in **verse 16**.

C. There is Support – v. 16

When the Lord designed us He gave us muscle and ligaments and bones for a reason. They provide support for the body, to help hold it up. It gives us form. If I didn't have any bones, there would be a big blob of Pastor Howie up on the platform. If I didn't have any muscle there would be no substance to me. If I didn't have any ligaments there wouldn't be anything to hold muscle and bones in place. My knee may just as likely float down around my ankle or behind my calf. If I had no ligaments holding my femur and tibia in place, my leg would rotate at the knee in circles like the hand on a watch.

The head keeps the body in line and the body in turn supports the other parts of the body. That is the way it is to be in the church as well. Each part has a significant role in helping support the rest of the body parts in order for them to do what they are supposed to do. It is mutual cooperation.

It is through the head that the rest of the body

functions and grows. When the body works together in love and unity there is growth resulting in Christlikeness. The bottom line is that we need each other. Every believer is to be involved in ministering to one another.

Warren Wiersbe has noted that “the body grows as the individual members grow, and they grow as they feed on the Word and minister to each other.”

Let us never forget that we owe our growth to the head which is Christ.

Let me sum it up with the words of John MacArthur “The growth of the church is not a result of clever methods but of every member of the Body fully using his spiritual gift in close contact with other believers. Christ is the source of the life and power and growth of the church, which He facilitates through each believer's gifts and mutual ministry in joints touching other believers. The power in the church flows from the Lord through individual believers and relationships between believers.

Where His people have close relationships of genuine spiritual ministry, God works; and where they are not intimate with each other and faithful with their gifts, He cannot work. He does not look for creativity, ingenuity, or cleverness but for willing and loving obedience. The physical body functions properly only as each member in union with every other member responds to the direction of the head to do exactly what it was designed to do.

The key idea...is for every member to remain close and intimate, holding tightly to fellowship with Christ, the Head, and thus not be led astray by that which is false and destructive.”

The church is an ongoing construction zone. I have the unique privilege of helping you mature so that you can grow to minister to each other. You are the ones who are to support each other in trying times and difficult circumstances when there is loss or discouragement. This week take time to evaluate if you are actively functioning in some way in the body of Christ, using your God given spiritual gift for the good of others and the glory of God.