

God's People for God's Plan
Ephesians 4:11-16

Someone who is anonymous, whether by choice or not, has made this astute observation: "when it comes to right or wrong, make a decision. The road of life is paved with flat squirrels who couldn't make a decision."

For over a year now the Deacons and I have been in an ongoing discussion about how we can have a greater impact on the spiritual lives of those who are a part of this church. We believe it was the right decision to change the two main services around so that the discussion time to follow can lead to lasting impact that will grow you as individuals and grow the church through changed lives. Please turn to Ephesians 4:11-16 as we consider God's people for God's plan.

I. LEADING TRANSFORMATION THAT
GROWS BELIEVERS – vs. 11-13

No matter what sport you watch or are involved in at any level there are always coaches who guide the players in their performance. It doesn't matter if it's a couple dads coaching the local soccer or T-ball team or if it's a professional sport, coaches are necessary. In football you have a coach for quarterbacks, running backs, receivers, the offensive and defensive linemen, the secondary and safety as well as strength coaches. Then there are the offensive and defensive coordinators and finally the coach. They all work together to make the team into a unit that is to function toward one goal.

The church is something like that as well requiring coaches. For our church there is of course me as your pastor, and the Deacons. We have asked Jim Neigh to join us in an advisory position as a consultant. Sometimes we can get tunnel vision and miss something and the expertise of another is necessary to help us gain a different perspective. Jim is providing that godly wisdom. Then there are

also the various facilitators and teachers who ultimately I am responsible for. Each has a certain role to fulfill in the overall scheme of helping each person in our care grow in Christ likeness.

The passage I have selected for today is with a twofold purpose.

The first purpose is to help further explain the rationale for the decision to change service times. The second purpose is to launch us into our next series on the one another passages of Scripture. If we are doing what we are supposed to be doing in growing each believer here in spiritual maturity then the natural outcome should be evident in how we interact with each other as part of the body of Christ. Paul lays the groundwork first for the people responsible for growth.

Throughout Paul's writings he has reminded believers that there is but one body of those who are in Christ. The lines of Jews and Gentiles have been erased. Social status whether man or woman, slave or free, rich or poor are of no consequence. There is but one body, a body that is to be unified. In what has been considered His High Priestly prayer on the eve of His betrayal and arrest, Jesus prayed for unity among the disciples and then continued by praying that the church today would also be united.

Paul begins by identifying the individuals who are to help establish this unity and how that is to be accomplished.

A. The People Responsible For Growth – v. 11

Some consider there to be five groups, some, including me, break them into four groups. I want you to notice first of all, and perhaps foremost, that these individuals are a gift given by Christ. We read in the beginning of verse 11 "It was He who gave..." Understand from the context of the previous verses that the "He" spoken of is Christ. It was He who gave the church these servants for the purpose we are about to discuss. The giving was as

a gift. It was something He knew the church would need to keep it going and growing into a healthy body. He first mentions apostles.

1. Apostles

I believe that this role, this position ceased at the end of the first century with the death of John. I believe the original 12 apostles in Acts along with Paul were the foundation that the church was set on. Ephesians 2:19-20 “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and member of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.”

An apostle had authority given to him by Christ, had been chosen by Christ, and had seen the risen Christ. They established and governed the church in the early days and had authority given to them by Christ to speak and write what God said which would be equal in authority to the Old Testament scriptures. He was one sent as an authoritative delegate on behalf of Christ.

When you look at a building you do not see or need more than one foundation. Only one is required. The same is true with the church as Christ’s body. The foundation was the apostles and Revelation 21:14 makes that clear when speaking about the New Jerusalem: “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

2. Prophets

Next are the prophets. They provided insight into doctrines of the faith. They always spoke for God but did not always give a new message from God. I look at this role as being different in nature than that of the Old Testament prophet. In the Old Testament some gave a prophetic word about something that would happen in the future, but often their role was to admonish about sin with a call to repentance and

return in obedience to God. In the New Testament church age at the beginning it seems to be a role suited for edifying, exhorting, and comforting the early church prior to the role we will consider last. They may have also provided a sense of God’s will until the entire canon of New Testament Scripture was completed.

I Corinthians 14:3 “But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.”

One author suggests that the “Apostolic message was more general and doctrinal, whereas that of the prophet was more personal and practical.”

Like the position of apostle, I also believe that the need for this position ceased at the end of the first century.

3. Evangelists

Then we have the evangelists. This comes from the root word for gospel or good news. This role is the same in nature as an evangelist today, taking the gospel to those who do not know about the good news of Jesus Christ. While we are all to be evangelists in that sense, these are specially gifted individuals whose task was to go to where the good news had not been shared and proclaim the truth about salvation in Christ. Paul, Timothy and Philip are examples of early church evangelists. They were going where no man had gone before with the gospel. We might describe them as missionaries and church planters. They were God’s plan to advance the gospel, preaching and explaining the good news of how to be saved through faith in Christ.

4. Pastor/Teachers

Finally, there is the pastor/teacher. For the sake of time, I won’t go into all the Greek grammatical structure as to why I believe this is one person as opposed to separate individuals as some suggest.

The terms used describe two separate tasks for the care of the local church. The word for pastor is the same word Jesus used when He told Peter to shepherd the flock. He is to provide the same kind of pastoral care that a shepherd would give to his sheep to ensure that their needs are met. The root meaning of the word pastor is to protect. Another similar word is elder, someone who watches over and nurtures the church. It's what Paul told the Ephesian elders as he spoke with them in Acts 20:28. That's why Paul told them to watch out for those who would come to destroy it. Their job was to protect it.

The other area of responsibility was in teaching God's timeless truth. The teacher is to explain the doctrines of God's Word in order for people to understand how it impacts their relationship with God and guides them in changed living.

So there is the pastor/teacher. I already mentioned about the elder. Another term is bishop. The elder emphasizes who he is and the bishop emphasizes what he does. The term pastor emphasizes his attitude and character while teacher emphasizes his responsibility. This person is to provide spiritual care and feeding of the flock. He must have a caring heart that nurtures the spiritual well-being of those under his responsibility.

This person came along after the church was established by the missionary to provide ongoing spiritual care. Both responsibilities of the pastor/teacher are essential to the overall health of the local church. That is his role. That is my role and I trust that in my 10 years here I have been meeting those duties.

Those were the people responsible for spiritual growth in the early church. Today I believe that only the evangelist and pastor/teacher are given for the benefit of the church.

Now let's look at the preparation for growth. Why

were they given by Christ? Paul lays out the goal or reason. It seems rather simple when you look at it.

I receive emails from a number of different Christian organizations that provide articles to help the local church and pastor. I think for the most part they are well meaning. Sometimes they leave me with a bad taste. Many are about church growth, how to increase attendance. There was a recent article on 10 things to do to instantly grow your church. I instantly deleted it. Others are about how to become a mega church. Sure I'd like to see our church grow numerically, but I don't need some marketing strategist to tell me we should add dazzling lights, balloons, hip music, a coffee bar and shorter messages in order to attract people. Now I don't want that to sound like I'm bad mouthing churches that do that. The success of a church isn't in how many people attend but in the depth of their walk with Christ.

A couple years ago a pastor who was one of the pioneers in the mega church movement wrote an article admitting that for many years they did it all wrong. He admitted that the spiritual growth they hoped would happen in fact wasn't. They were setting out on a new strategy to grow the flock.

I'd rather have a church with 100 people who have a spiritual depth a mile deep than a church with 1,000 or 10,000 people who have a spiritual depth only an inch deep.

These gifted individuals were given by Christ to help grow the church spiritually. Consider the preparation required for growth.

B. The Preparation Required for Growth – vs. 12-13

I want to say this before I jump to this point. Spiritual growth is not determined by how much you do in the church, but rather how much you look like Christ in character. My role is to help you love

Christ more today than you did yesterday. So why were these men given? Notice first of all they were to prepare them for good works that serves others.

1. Preparing for good works that serves others II Timothy 3:16-17

If all we have done is make you Biblical scholars we haven't done our job. This verse says we are to equip or prepare God's people for good works or works of service. The work of ministry is not the task of one person or a select few, but of the whole church engaged in ministry of some kind. Now I want you to notice that it is open ended. Paul doesn't describe the ministry you are to be involved in only that it is to be good works.

Matthew 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven."

Galatians 6:9-10 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."

I Corinthians 12:4-7, 11-12, 14, 18-20

Every believer has been given at least one primary spiritual gift that is intended to benefit the rest of the body and it is through that spiritual gift that you do your good works that serve others. My teaching is to lead you to use your spiritual gift in some way, in a way that is determined between you and the Lord. Teaching is to get you involved in ministry.

Listen carefully to this insightful advice from John MacArthur. "The study and teaching of God's Word takes time. The evangelist or pastor/teacher therefore cannot fulfill his God-given responsibility if he is encumbered with the planning and administration of a multitude of programs – no matter how worthy and helpful they are (Acts 6:2, 4). The surest road to a church's stagnation, to the

pastor's burnout, or to both is for the pastor to become engulfed in activities and programs that he has too little time for prayer and the Word. It is a lack of knowledge of God's Word and obedience to it (Hosea 4:6), not lack of programs and methods, that destroy his people. When they fail it is not because of weak teaching. The first concern of the leadership of the church should be for the filled seats, not the empty ones."

If I do all the work of ministry I am not doing what I'm supposed to be doing. My work should be to teach you in a way that releases you for ministry. My teaching must equip you to exercise your spiritual gift by serving others to benefit the body.

I Corinthians 15:58 tells us that we are to always be abounding in the work of the Lord, because that labor is not in vain.

Why? What benefit is there in using your spiritual gift and doing good works? Or maybe I could ask it this way, what detriment is there if you don't use your spiritual gift? We see the reason in the next statement Paul makes: "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we ALL reach unity..." All means everyone in the body.

When we don't use our spiritual gift to serve others in the body, then the body suffers. There is an adverse effect on the body. That's why I really struggle with people who believe they can be a good Christian even though they don't go to church. They hurt the body by not being there to engage with the rest of the body. Corporate worship glorifies God, but I also believe that the corporate exercise of spiritual gifts glorifies God as well.

There's a big push in education these days called "no child left behind." They make every effort to ensure that each child has equal opportunity to achieve academically. Paul wants the church to achieve unity and we see what he means in the next section.

2. Preparing for growth that unifies the church

The exercise of your spiritual gift unites the church and does so in three ways. When I teach in a way that inspires good works spiritual growth occurs. “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.”

- a. Unity in faith
- b. Unity in knowledge
- c. Unity in maturity

That word “until” expresses not only the duration, meaning however long it takes, but also the purpose, that everyone is to reach the goal.

Faith here does not refer to saving faith but a common conviction of faith about Christ and doctrine. We are all on the same page biblically speaking.

And by maturity I mean character that is Christ like. As we mature in Christ there is a spiritual transformation that takes place where we exhibit more of the fruit of the Spirit.

As we each do our part in the body through good works, the body of Christ grows and matures. Unity then infers mutual accountability and encouragement. That’s what we hope will occur in the discussion time that will follow at adult impact.

Now I can do my part in preaching, teaching, and caring, but you also have responsibility toward each other. Stunted growth or spiritual malnutrition in the body occurs when I don’t teach you adequately, but the same can also occur when you don’t exercise your spiritual gift or when we hinder someone from exercising their gift.

We have a responsibility to everyone in the body to the exclusion of no one. This encourages unity.

3. Preparing for guidance that exemplifies Christlikeness

The exercise of our spiritual gifts is to help each other pursue and attain unity in the body of Christ. The word “attain” means to come down to a goal and speaks of bringing everyone to the same end. A football team must work together to get the ball into the end zone. That’s the goal. On the other hand the end goal of the defense is to prevent the offense from getting the ball into the end zone. Either way they are working toward a goal.

Our goal as a unified body of believers is to get everyone to the end goal, to reach a knowledge of Christ that changes our character to His. We should not only be concerned about our attaining Christ like character, we should also be concerned about helping each other reach that same goal. Colossians 1:28-29 “We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.” Paul’s aim was to help others grow to be like Christ, not through His own efforts but in the power of Christ.

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

Your leadership has a responsibility of leading transformation that guides you the believer. The result is lasting transformation that grows believers.

II. LASTING TRANSFORMATION THAT GROWS BELIEVERS – vs. 14-16

Paul uses the imagery of the body growing under the direction of the head. Christ is the head of the church and we are to follow His leading otherwise we cannot properly grow.

A. Lasting Transformation Equips Against Attack – v. 14

When we put into practice the advice given in verses 11-13 we will not be like an infant tossed around by waves. The word “infant” here is a word that means a baby who cannot talk. Such an infant can’t take care of itself, can’t defend itself. A person who is spiritually immature cannot defend against attack by those who would seek to pull you away from the truth. You’re helpless. Notice that spiritual maturity in the church can defend against two types of attack. That’s what Paul warned the Ephesian leaders about.

Acts 20:28-31a “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!”

Incidentally, the idea of being tossed by waves literally means to be whirled around, a violent swinging that makes a person dizzy. Being spiritually mature equips in two ways.

1. It equips against drifting aimlessly

When we are grounded in the Word of God we won’t be swayed to follow some other teaching that sounds good and tickles our ears. We will know the truth. Not every part of the body grows at the same rate or with the same desire. We need to watch out for someone who may be drifting away from their walk with Christ. Unity in the body will help us keep from drifting aimlessly.

2. It equips against deceptive association

Warren Wiersbe tells the story about a pastor friend who was visited by a missionary asking for support

for his work. The pastor asked him what church he belonged to. The missionary stated he belonged to the invisible church of Christ. The pastor asked for clarification. He got the same response. This went on for some time with the missionary insisting that he belonged to the true invisible church. The pastor then responded by giving the missionary some invisible money.

There are a lot of charlatans who want to intentionally deceive us by using whatever means they can to trick us into following something they know to be false. They will use clever manipulation to make what they say seem like the truth. It’s the same deception Satan used in the Garden with Eve. The term Paul uses here is taken from gambling and it’s the word used for loaded dice.

Unity in the body will help keep us from deceptive association.

Lasting transformation equips against attack.

Lasting transformation encourages activity.

B. Lasting Transformation Encourages Activity – vs. 15-16

There are three

1. Spiritual transformation encourages active growth
2. Spiritual transformation encourages active unity
3. Spiritual transformation encourages active service

It is from the head that we grow and each member of the body is carefully fitted together, joined and held together by every supporting ligament. Where one part isn’t doing its job, the rest can be stunted or weak. When every part is working together supporting each other, then unity and spiritual maturity occurs. The source of this growth comes through Christ. The degree of our attachment to Him will determine the degree of growth we as a body will experience with Him and with each other.

Paul underscores an important principle that without

love it is impossible to mature or develop maturity. We each have a responsibility to one another in the body of Christ. It is through our mutual cooperation in unity that we grow spiritually and become more like Christ in character.

German poet and skeptic Heinrich Heine once told a group of Christians that if they showed him their redeemed life he might be inclined to believe in their redeemer. Again the words of Matthew 5:16 remind us to let our light shine before others.

A redeemed life is demonstrated in how we act toward others and that is the topic of our next series. As we close I'm wondering if God is in some way speaking to you about how you can exercise your spiritual gift for the benefit of this body of believers. Paul told Timothy to fan into flames his spiritual gift.

Does your gift need a little fanning?

Are we letting Christ build our church?