

Grow: Equipped for Ministry

Ephesians 4:11-16

Historians tell us that it was Martin Luther who designed the very first Protestant church building in Torgau, Germany. Built for the castle of Luther's protector, John Fredrick I and known as the Castle Church of Torgau, the edifice was built in 1544. Prior to this, protestant services had been held in buildings that housed former Roman Catholic churches. When Luther had the opportunity to design a church that would reflect the new emphases of the Reformation, he made sure that the basic structure of the building itself would convey a picture of the gospel. No structural change would have been more obvious to those in the 1500's than the placement of the pulpit.

It had been customary in Roman Catholicism to place the pulpit at a distance from the people where it and the altar were separated from the people with screens that designated the space as reserved for professional clergy alone. In contrast to this, Luther arranged for the pulpit to be placed among the people as opposed to separate from the people. Luther emphasized the priesthood of the believer, and he wanted the placement of the pulpit to silently emphasize that the preacher was no more holy than than the people. He ministered and preached among the people because all were fulfilling the calling of God upon their lives as they each served God according to the gifts that they had been given.

The priesthood of the believer is one of the greatest doctrines in the Word of God as it tells me that I can go into God's presence.

This passage of Scripture is one of the most overlooked and least understood passages in all the New Testament, yet at the same time it is also one of the most important. Within these verses, Paul explains the nature of ministry and the responsibility that belongs to both the church and her leadership.

Rather than simply focusing on leaders as being the ministers, this text shows us how every member of the body of Christ has been gifted and is responsible for ministry.

We must have an "every member a minister" mindset.

Ministry in the body of Christ is the responsibility of every single member of the body of Christ, not for just a “special few.” For this to be true, leaders must be in the business of equipping the church for ministry. This is the subject of what Paul writes to the church in these verses.

I like how Warren Wiersbe has outlined the first 16 verses of this chapter:

- The grace of unity
- The ground of unity
- The gifts for unity
- The growth of unity

What we find in these verses is God’s plan for the growth of His church. A church that is in unity will be growing as her leaders equip each member for the work of ministry. This is the growth that Jesus Christ has in mind for His church.

1. The GIFTS that Christ gives to His church (4:11-12)

“And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

The preceding verses deal with the giftedness and the diversity of gifts that Jesus Christ gives to the members of His body. Paul says in verse 7 that it is a matter of grace.

In these verses, Paul mentions how Christ gifts the church with gifted men for a specific objective.

Gifted Men

There are three lists of various spiritual gifts given in the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 27–31; Romans 12:3–8; and Ephesians 4:11.

Since these lists are not identical, it may be that Paul has not named all the gifts that are available. Paul wrote that some gifts are more vitals than others, but that all believers are needed if the body is to function normally (1 Cor. 14:5, 39). Here in these

verses, Paul names not so much “gifts” as the gifted men that Jesus has placed in His church, and there are four of them:

- Apostles
- Prophets
- Evangelists
- Pastor/Teachers

“Apostle” - *one who is sent with a commission*

The New Testament shows us that Jesus had many disciples, but He selected twelve to be apostles. What is the difference? A disciple is a “follower” or a “learner,” but an apostle is a “divinely appointed representative.” The Apostles were to give witness of the Resurrection (Acts 1:15–22), and therefore had to have seen the risen Christ personally (1 Cor. 9:1–2). An apostle was one who had seen the risen Lord and had been specifically commissioned by Him.

There are no apostles today in the strictest New Testament sense. These men helped to lay the foundation of the church. Paul has already said that the church is:

Ephesians 2:20 - **“Built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone.”**

Once the foundation of the church was laid, the office of the apostle was no longer needed. God authenticated their ministry and calling with special miracles.

Of course, in a broad sense, all Christians have an “apostolic” ministry.

John 2:21 - **“As My Father has sent Me, even so send I you.”**

As Christ’s disciples, we are ‘sent’ into the world with the task of making disciples, but we cannot claim to be apostles.

“Prophet” - *one who proclaims the revealed will of God*

The role of the prophetic office had more to do with forth-telling than it did fore-telling. Not so much future events as God's will.

Warren Wiersbe - *"Believers in the New Testament churches did not possess Bibles, nor was the New Testament written and completed. How, then, would these local assemblies discover God's will? His Spirit would share God's truth with those possessing the gift of prophecy."*

Now that we have a complete revelation of God's will through His Word, the office of the prophet is no longer needed much in the same way the office of apostle is no longer needed. However, there still is a prophetic element to the role of preaching in the sense that the preacher "forth-tells" what God has already said in His Word.

"Evangelist" - *bearer of good news*

The evangelist was one who traveled from place to place for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the lost. Philip is an example of an evangelist in the book of Acts.

John MacArthur - *"The evangelist is not a man with ten suits and ten sermons who runs a road show."*

Evangelists in the true biblical sense were church planters and missionaries who went places where Christ had not been named and led people to faith in Him. They taught them the Word, built them up, and then moved on to a new territory.

Though every believer is to witness and pastors are to do the work of an evangelist, there are those whom God gifts in evangelism in a very unique way.

"Pastor/Teacher" - *shepherd who teaches and instructs*

Paul is referring to one office with two ministries. The word "pastor" literally means means 'shepherd,' which indicates that the local church is a flock of sheep.

Acts 20:28 - **"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."**

It is the responsibility of the shepherd to feed and lead the flock.

1 Peter 5:1-4 - “So I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

The pastor teaches by means of God’s Word and his own life.

Scripture is the food that nourishes the sheep. It is the staff that guides and disciplines the sheep. The Word of God is the local church’s protection and provision, and no amount of entertainment, good fellowship, or other religious substitutes can take its place.

The pastor’s life should serve as an example to those he leads, a tangible expression of God’s truth lived outwardly.

Specific Objective

“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”

My friend has referred to this passage as the comma that has resulted in a discipleship coma. The KJV translated it as follows: *“...for the perfecting of the saints [,] for the work of the ministry.”*

The translators inserted a comma there where there should not have been one. The result has led to many who have read this verse and made the assumption that the work of the ministry is solely the responsibility of the gifted men.

Leaders are given to the church for the purpose of equipping the saints.

“Equip” - *word was used to describe the setting of a bone*

The idea is that which is fit, restored to its original condition, or is being made complete.

Here the meaning is to “make fully ready” and is preparation for the work of the ministry. One of the purposes of the gifted men is to prepare, to equip, and to make believers ready for service.

A person who has been equipped is one who has been made ready for an assignment. Thus, the primary concern of the pastor ought to be for the filled seats, not the empty ones. When we make disciples who live their lives centered around the mission of Jesus, they will fill the empty seats with people they are leading to faith in Jesus Christ and inviting to church.

Archibald Brown - *“Jesus pitied sinners, sighed and wept over them, but never sought to amuse them.”*

Paul’s point in these verses is that pastors and church leaders are to equip the church for the work of ministry. Leaders are to involve and solicit the participation of the whole body in ministry.

There is no place for a consumer mindset in the faith family.

“Building up” - *the idea of ongoing construction; edifying*

Gifted men are given to the church for the specific objective of equipping the saints for ministry and edifying the body of Christ.

I think we sometimes forget that the church is a work in progress. Different images are used to describe this—building, growing, maturing—but all reflect the fact that the body of Christ is a living organism that is becoming what God has created it to be. Every Christian has a part to play in this work, and every Christian is being prepared for his or her particular works of service in that growing process by the contribution of pastors, teachers, and others.

2. The GOAL that Christ has for His church (4:13-14)

“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may

no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

The goal of leaders equipping the body and the body doing the work of ministry is spiritual maturity. There can be no spiritual maturity apart from involvement in the work of ministry.

Every member of the body has been gifted for ministry.

Spiritual growth doesn't simply happen in a classroom; it happens on the assembly line as God's people are lined up shoulder to shoulder with their sleeves rolled up while going to work in ministry.

Jesus prayed for laborers and workers:

Matthew 9:35-38 - “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”

The goal that Jesus has for the church can be seen in two ways:

The goal of MATURITY in the faith

“Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children...”

The goal that Jesus has in mind for His church is unity of the faith and intimate knowledge of Him. The result of growth is maturity in the faith that serves and reproduces.

“Measure” - word is ‘metron’ from which we get metric

What is the standard by which we measure ourselves? Paul says that it is the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The goal of STABILITY in the faith

“...tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

The imagery is that of a child being swept out to sea by the current. Paul is referring to the rip current of false teaching. Those who are not anchored will be subject to the wind and waves and will be tossed about in every direction.

“Human Cunning” - *the word is ‘kubia’ from where we get the word cube, as in cubes of dice; dice-throwing was often loaded and used to manipulate and cheat people*

If Paul were writing this letter today, he might say something like this, “That you may no longer be children, tossed about by man’s opinion and cultural fad and worldly ideas.”

I’m amazed at the tendency for the church to chase fads.

In our attempt to be relevant and to connect with people, we assume that we have to have this and that, look like this or dress a certain way. In all our attempts to connect with people, if we aren’t careful, we can fail to connect with the only One who has the power to transform people to begin with--The Holy Spirit.

I am much more concerned about connecting with the Holy Spirit than I am connecting with an audience. The fear of God must be kept in the forefront rather than the fear of man. The reason is that when the pastor is filled with the Spirit’s power, he are going to really connect in a powerful way with those to whom he preaches:

- lost people will be convicted
- believers will be strengthened

Maturity and stability in the faith should be the desire of every single one of Christ’s disciples. The result will be discernment, wisdom, and confidence.

3. The GROWTH that Christ wants in His church (4:15-16)

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”

Instead of being tossed about, the church ought to be grounded and anchored. Paul says that truth in love leads to growth.

It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy.

Spiritual growth is four dimensional:

- Grow Up - maturity in worship and love for God; I am to grow more in my love for Christ with each passing day
- Grow Down - He must increase, and I must decrease; this means that I think of self less, not less of self
- Grow In - read and meditate upon Scripture; growth in the knowledge of God and His will
- Grow Out - service in the body of Christ; growth in my relationships with faith family; gospel witness in the world

Spiritual growth is not always about learning something new. in many ways, the believer's most important growth is in response to truth that he or she already knows but has not fully applied.

I've heard it said that the average church member is educated well beyond the level of his obedience.

The Great Commission is often met with great procrastination. The result is stagnated growth in the body of Christ and continued lostness in the world around us.

There's an incident from the American Revolution that illustrates what tragedy can result from procrastination. Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rahl was commander of the Hessian troops on the British side in Trenton, New Jersey. Somewhere along the night of December 25 or 26, 1776, he and some of his men were playing cards when a courier brought an urgent message stating that General Washington was crossing the Delaware River. Rather than responding to the situation, Rahl put the letter in his pocket and didn't even bother to read it until the game was finished. Then, realizing the seriousness of the matter, he tried to rally his men to meet the coming attack, but his procrastination was his undoing. He and many of his men were killed and the rest of the regiment were captured.

Nolbert Quayle - *"Only a few minutes' delay cost him his life, his honor, and the liberty of his soldiers. Earth's history is strewn with the wrecks of half-finished plans and unexecuted resolutions. 'Tomorrow' is the excuse of the lazy and refuge of the incompetent."*