

Building the Body of Christ, Part 1

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11

Code: 1926

INTRODUCTION

There isn't a passage in all of the Word of God that has had a greater impact on the destiny of my own personal ministry and Grace Community Church than Ephesians 4:11-16. When I came out of seminary and was given the opportunity to pastor a church on my own, I was inexperienced in terms of the specifics of pastoring. The one thing I did know, however, was the principle set forth in Ephesians 4:11-16---that the job of the teaching pastor is "*the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry*." In my tense study of the book of Ephesians, this section had just grabbed my heart, and I realized then that this could be the heart of the ministry. So when I first talked with the elders at Grace, they asked me what my direction was in the ministry. Well, I told them that if I could just commit myself to perfecting the saints through the teaching of the Word, I wouldn't have to do anything else, because the saints are built up they do the work of the ministry. I asked them for the privilege of spending 30-35 hours each week in studying the Word, and those gracious, generous men were willing to do that. That's really the history of Grace Church from my standpoint.

A. The Issue of Perfection

The one phrase in Ephesians 4:11-16 that is the key to the entire passage is found in verse 12: "*For the perfecting the saints...*" Everything that follows in verses 12-16 not only comes as a result of perfecting the saints, but is dependent upon it. This is the issue in the church! The gifted men are given to the church for the perfecting of the saints--not to entertain the saints, coddle the saints, evangelize the saints. There are two aspects to this:

1. TO BRING THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS TO MATURITY.
2. TO MAKE A COLLECTIVE UNITY OF THE BODY (1 Cor. 1:10)

I believe that the perfecting of the saints is the heart of the ministry, and anything other than this is a misdirection of the purposes of God.

B. The Categories of Perfection.

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus said, "*Be ye, therefore, perfect even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect.*" God's basic standard is perfection. God's ultimate goal is the perfection of His people. The word "perfection" is *katartizo* in the Greek and means "*to be fully equipped, mature, complete, full-grown.*" It can have all different meanings and doesn't have to mean absolute, sinless perfection. There are three ways that this word is used in Scripture in relation to the believer:

1. POSITIONAL PERFECTION

Hebrews 10:14 says, "*For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.*" When Christ offered Himself on the cross, He did a work which, when applied to you and me, makes us forever perfect. In what sense? Not in the sense of our daily life but in the sense of our position before God. As Christians we have a perfect standing before God--positionally. We are holy and blameless, a chaste bride without spot or blemish. God sees us as perfect as Jesus Christ because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us. This is our positional perfection which comes by salvation.

2. ULTIMATE PERFECTION

Hebrews 12:23 talks about "*the spirits of just men made perfect,*" referring to the saints with the Lord. Ultimate perfection comes when you die and go to be with the Lord. In other words, it's gained by

glorification. There is coming a perfection in the future for every one of us when our spirits will be made perfect and will be joined to a perfect, new, glorified body (1 Cor. 15). That's ultimate perfection. Notice that you had nothing to do with positional perfection and you can't do anything about ultimate perfection. There's one other category...

3. PRACTICAL PERFECTION

This is the category of living here and now. God wants the believer who is positionally perfect and who will be ultimately perfect, to match his practice to his position. In other words, the Lord wants you to be perfect practically. This doesn't mean absolutely sinless---it means mature, complete, grown-up, and fully equipped as a Christian. There's no greater tragedy than an infantile Christian - a child who is *"tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive"* (Eph. 4:14) God wants us to be complete in practice. Summarizing the categories of perfection: Positional perfection is gained by *salvation*. Ultimate perfection gained by *glorification*. Practical perfection is gained *sanctification*, the process of Christian maturity. Our text, Ephesians 4:11-16, is talking about practical perfection. God has given the teaching pastors and the evangelists, He gave the apostles and prophets in the past, for one purpose--not to perfect the saints positionally or ultimately, but to mature the saints here and now. That's the task!

C. The Importance of Perfection

1. TO PAUL

In 2 Corinthians 13:11, Paul sums up the 29 chapters he had written to the Corinthians and says, *"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect..."* To sum it all up he tells them to be mature (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1).

2. TO THE WRITER OF HEBREWS

In Hebrews 13:20-21 he writes, *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight."*

3. TO PETER

In 1 Peter 5:10 Peter writes, *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect..."*

4. TO JESUS

Jesus said, in Matthew 5:48, *"Be ye, therefore perfect..."* Whether it was Peter, the writer of Hebrews, Paul, or Jesus... the principle is the same--the job is to make the saints mature, to build them up. Nothing less than that satisfies the heart of God.

D. The Agency of Perfection

The agency of perfection is the Holy Spirit. I don't believe for one minute that any human being can perfect the saints. The only impact anybody can have on somebody else's maturity is when the Spirit of God working through them.

1. GALATIANS 3:3

The Galatians had been ministered to initially by the Apostle Paul with great results. However, through the influence of some legalists, they began to follow a path of legalism and tried to grind out their maturity on their own. That's like eating your own body to grow--starting with your fingers and eating your way to maturity. What you end up with is zero. The Galatians thought they were going to mature through their own self-righteousness. So, in Galatians 3:3 Paul says, *"Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"* Paul is saying, in other words, *"Are you kidding? Are you so foolish that you think you can be born of the Spirit, indwelt by the Spirit, placed into the body by the Spirit, energized by the Spirit, and now perfected in the flesh?"* The agency of perfection is the Spirit.

2. 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

Paul says that when we gaze on the glory of the Lord, we will be changed into His image, ascending from one level of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, the end of maturity is Christlikeness,

and the Holy Spirit is the agent of this perfecting process.

E. The Tools of Perfection

1. TRIALS OR TESTS

James 1:2-4 says, *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into various trials (or testings), knowing this, that the testing of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."* James says that one of the things that leads to perfection is testing. The Spirit of God will bring opportunities into your life for you to choose between right or wrong. The way you choose is an exercise of your muscle. Each time you choose the right way, you've stretched your spiritual muscle and strengthened yourself. The Spirit of God puts in your way obstacles, tests, and opportunities for you to exercise faith in Him as opposed to believing in yourself--opportunities to put your confidence in God against all opposition. These trials and testings help perfect us by stretching our muscle and exercising us. It's part of the growing process.

2. SUFFERING

Sometimes tests bring suffering, but that is all right because 1 Peter 5:10 says that Christ Jesus and God are working to perfect you. Then it says, *"After ye have suffered awhile..."* In other words, sometimes those tests turn into very sad things. Sometimes the making of a man or a woman demands some pain, hurt, and suffering. If it is taken right and the right response is made, then there is going to be victory and strengthening. The Holy Spirit uses trials and suffering to perfect us. God will take care of the trials and the suffering, but there is one other element of growth where different men of God come into play...

3. SCRIPTURE

a. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* The greatest tool the Spirit of God has for the perfecting of the saints is nothing more than Scripture. The Word of God is what makes the man of God perfect.
b. 1 Peter 2:2 *"As new born babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it."* Peter makes a tremendous analogy. He is saying that the single-mindedness of a baby ought to characterize the Christian. We should have the same undivided single-mindedness to hunger and thirst after the Word of God. As milk brings growth to the baby, so the Word of God brings growth to the man and woman of God. If we are to perfect the saints, Paul knows we must recognize four things that are basic to our text of Ephesians 4:11-16: The Preachers of Perfection, The Progress to Perfection, The Purposes of Perfection, and The Power of Perfection.

Lesson

I. THE PREACHERS OF PERFECTION (v. 11)

In Ephesians 4:8 it says, *"When He ascended up on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."* What were the gifts He gave? Verse 11 says, *"And He gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some pastors and teachers."* (lit. teaching-shepherds). These gifted men are the gifts of a gracious Christ to His beloved church. He not only gave gifts to individuals, but He gave gifted men to the church at large--the preachers of perfection. Their task? To perfect (or mature) the saints.

A. The Apostles

There has been a lot of misunderstanding about the Apostles. So let's look at their ministry and see if we can clarify some points. I believe there were several things that made an Apostle very unique:

1. THEY WERE FOUNDATIONAL TO THE CHURCH

In Ephesians 2:20 it says that the church is *"built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone."* The Apostles and prophets were for the foundation of the church. They had their day and no longer exist.

2. THEY HAD A REVELATORY MINISTRY

The Apostles received direct revelation from God. They didn't study the New Testament - they were

writing it! In Ephesians 3:5, the Apostle Paul said that the mystery of the New Testament, *"which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."* God's Spirit spoke directly to these men and they verbally gave the very words of God. This was done because there wasn't a New Testament for the early church.

3. THEY WERE PERSONALLY APPOINTED BY JESUS CHRIST

In 1 Corinthians 12:28 it says that the Apostles were appointed to their position. The Greek word used is *eqeto*, coming from the verb *tiqemi* which means "to appoint, place, or set." The Apostles had a specific appointment, as do other offices given to the church, but theirs was unique because they were personally called by Jesus Christ. In other words, the Apostles (with a capital A) were the original twelve (plus Matthias who filled in for Judas) and the Apostle Paul. They were all personally called by Jesus Christ. The last personal appointment to the Apostolate was when Jesus Christ called the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. There have been none since! NOTE: There is no such thing as Apostolic succession. The Apostles did not pass their right of Apostleship on to anybody, either by heredity or any other way. The Bible speaks of no such things!

4. THEY HAVE UNIQUE PLACES OF RULERSHIP

Luke 22:28 gives us the word of our Lord Jesus to them: *"Ye are they who have continued with Me in My trials. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me, that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* In other words, there were an equal number of Apostles to equal the number of tribes in Israel so that each would uniquely rule a tribe. There can be no more! God only design twelve tribes and God set up the millennial kingdom be ruled by twelve Apostles.

5. THEY HAD A UNIQUE THREE-FOLD MINISTRY

According to Mark 3:13-15, the Apostles had three duties: To preach, to heal sickness, and to cast out demons. The Apostles set the foundation of the church theologically, so that when the church met together in Acts 2:42, they studied the Apostles' doctrine. Their ministry was both revelatory and reiterative, giving direct revelation or republishing the revelation they had already received. Through them, both the theology and the congregations of the churches were established.* ***What's the difference between an Apostle and an apostle?*** There is a category of people in the Bible referred to as *apostoloi*, but they are not part of the official Apostolate. The Greek word *apostolov* literally means "a sent one." 2 Corinthians 8:23 makes reference to men called apostles of the churches. However, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ and the "sent ones" of the churches are two different categories. One was appointed by the Lord Himself, while the other was appointed by the church and sent out for ministry. The church is sending out people today who are apostles, but the Apostles of Jesus Christ who were sent out personally by Him, are no longer around. They were foundational.

B. The Prophets

These aren't the Old Testament prophets, these are the New Testament ones. The Greek word for prophet is *profetev*, which means "one who speaks forth," These men were the preachers of the New Testament.

1. THEIR PRACTICAL MINISTRY

What the prophets did was follow up on the work already begun by the Apostles. The Apostles were itinerant. They would move around to new areas where Christ wasn't named and preach, establish a church, build it up, and move on. Apparently, the prophets were the ones who stayed and continued to preach, or republish, the Apostolic doctrine to the already organized churches. Now and then they would get direct revelation, but in every instance recorded in the New Testament where direct revelation was given to a prophet, it has to do with the practical life of the church. In fact, there are only a couple of instances. In one instance, Agabus predicted a famine that would affect the church (Acts 11:28). Another time, Agabus predicted that Paul would be made a prisoner if he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:10,11). So it seems as though the Apostles majored on theology and the prophets majored on the practical application of the theology to the local church. In many ways the

Apostles were the forerunners of the evangelists, who went out and proclaimed Christ, founded churches, and won people to Him. The prophets, who went in and made practical application to the church, were the forerunners to the teaching-pastors.

2. THEIR POWER

The prophets were not as powerful as the Apostles. They didn't have the gifts or the ministries that the Apostles had, or the ability to speak divine revelation in the same measure that the Apostles did. This is why in 1 Corinthians 14:29-32 Paul tells the prophets of the Corinthian church to make a check and balance on themselves, because sometimes the things they said weren't true. The power of the Apostles is obviously diminished by the time it reaches the level of the prophets. But nonetheless, they were strategic to the early years of the church.

3. THEIR PLACE OF IMPORTANCE

During the time of the early church there were so many false prophets that it was essential for God to have His true prophets. Now, rather than the prophets being somebody who predicted the future, although that was a part of it. They were the preachers who preached the Apostolic doctrine and applied it to the local churches. We're deeply indebted to them. If the church hadn't grown in the book of Acts, the chain would have been broken and it wouldn't be here today. The prophets were strategic, because when the Apostles were gone, it was the ministry of the prophets that sustained the early church. However, they too were foundational and have passed away.

C. Evangelists

What is an evangelist? Some people think an evangelist someone with fifteen sermons and fifteen suits, while others see an evangelist as someone in a tent filled with sawdust, pounding a great big pulpit, and screaming about liquor. To many, an evangelist is someone who holds city-wide crusades or reaches people through television. I don't know what your picture of an evangelist is, so let me give you a little idea of what it is biblically.

* *What does the word "evangelist" have to do with a soap-seller?*

The basic source of the word *evangelist* has an obscure connection to the concept of a soap-seller. When soap was just coming into vogue, they used to sell it on street corners. The sales pitch consisted of taking some cruddy, dirty, seedy, tacky looking guy and washing him in front of everybody. Then the soap-seller would say, "Now you can see what a phenomenal product this is. Look what we've done to this guy!" When Jesus Christ doing on the inside what soap did on the outside, they branded them as soap-sellers.

An evangelist is basically somebody who presents Jesus Christ where Christ is not known. They are present today following in the Apostles' footsteps. The Apostles faded away, they ceased, because their ministry was unique--but the evangelist took over. Paul told Timothy to "*do the work of an evangelist*" (2 Tim. 4:5).

A biblical evangelist was somebody who: 1. WENT TO A PLACE WHERE CHRIST WASN'T NAMED. 2. WON PEOPLE TO CHRIST. 3. STAYED UNTIL HE BUILT THE CHURCH AND ORDAINED ELDERS TO TAKE OVER THE LEADERSHIP. 4. THEN MOVED TO A NEW AREA. Evangelism is the ability to go into an area and establish and build a church. In an area where a church already exists, evangelist wins people to Christ, integrates them into church, and takes part in their maturing process. I feel that when evangelism is disconnected from a local church, it loses its power in many ways. New converts need a place where they can be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So whenever God calls someone to be an evangelist, the church needs to give him room to function in evangelism within its own doors--not turn him loose to hit the road!

D. The Teaching-Shepherds

1. THE TERM

Verse 11 reads, "*And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.*" The last category of gifted men is teaching-shepherds. The Greek construction indicates that "*pastors and teachers*" are not two words, but rather a hyphenated word,

pastor-teacher. The word “*some*,” which is before “*apostles*,” “*prophets*,” “*evangelists*,” and “*pastors*,” is not before “*teachers*.” This is because it is not set apart as a separate category. And I might add that the word “*pastor*” only appears once in the whole Bible-- here in this verse. Translators used the Latin word *pastor* for the translation of the Greek word *poimen*. I don't know why they did this because every other time *poimen* is used in the Bible, it is always translated with the idea of shepherding. So the best translation of “pastor and teacher” is teaching-shepherd.

2. THE TRANSFER

The teaching-shepherd is different from the evangelist in that the evangelist wins people to Christ and builds up the flock, while the teaching-shepherd teaches and shepherds the flock. Again we see a beautiful parallel. The evangelist is like the Apostle--itinerate, on the move confronting people in the world. Whereas the teaching-shepherd is more like the prophet who applied doctrine to the local situation, building the flock. The teaching-shepherd was permanently settled in one place--always teaching.

3. THE TASK

In Acts 20:28 Paul gave instructions to the shepherds of the flock at Miletus: “*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*” Now there are two things in that verse that a pastor must do--to lead and feed; to take the oversight of the flock and to feed it. In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter says the same thing: “*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight.*” The teaching-shepherd is to be committed to two things--feeding and leading.a. To lead the flock - Leadership involves two things:1) *Principle*If you're going to lead, you must know the principles that give you the direction God wants you to go.2) *Pattern*If you're going to lead, you also must model or pattern the principles taught. Paul said to the Philippians, “*Be followers together of me*” (3:17); and he also said “*Those things, which ye have learned, and received and heard and seen in me, do.*” (4:9).b. To Feed the flock - Feeding the flock also has two aspects to it :1) *To warn* - to say what not to do (the negative element).2) *To teach* - to say what to do (the positive element).I believe if a man of God will be faithful to take heed to himself first, and make sure his life is right before God day-by-day, and then commit himself to lead his people by principle and pattern, and them by warning and teaching them, God will grow a church beyond his expectations (Eph. 3:20).

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