

Building the Body of Christ, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 4:11–16

Code: 1927

INTRODUCTION

A. God's Pattern for Church Growth

Ephesians 4:11-16 has done more to shape and frame my own approach to the ministry than any other passage of Scripture. This passage is absolutely necessary, as it is God's pattern and direction for the church. There has been a tremendous emphasis in the last few years on the subject of church growth--seminars, institutes, conferences, books, discussions, etc. -- a never-ending preoccupation in our particular day and time. But I submit to you, that the pattern for the progress of building the church is Ephesians 4:11-16; and in verse 12 is the one central point which the church must strive to attain--"the perfecting of the saints." This is what we are after. This is the key to God's pattern for church growth.

B. Contemporary Gimmicks for Church Growth

Recently, the church in America has been preoccupied with just getting people into the church. The number of people in one's church was the important issue. Success in the ministry was based on whether or not you had more bodies in your building than the guy down the street. Churches had lots of contests, prizes, and gimmicks just to get people into the church. There were even contests between churches to see who could get the most people. Now, churches are becoming more oriented to entertainment. We are in the midst of a society that doesn't know the meaning of commitment - just convenience. If it's convenient and entertaining, people come. Everybody wants to know what the church can do for them, but they're not willing to put anything into it. So now churches pay up to 10 thousand dollars a night for a celebrity to come and give a testimony - just to draw a crowd. This is not God's pattern for building the church! The goal of the church is not to entertain, coddle, or even evangelize the saints. If the same people are evangelized long enough, they'll think their carnality is spirituality and will never mature. The church must get back to the Word of God; and the Word says that the church is for "*the perfecting of the saints.*"

The reason there were apostles to write the Word of God, the reason there were prophets to lay a foundation for the church, and the reason there are evangelists and teaching--shepherds is all the same---"for the perfecting of the saints." God's pattern has never altered. This is the plan and the basis of what the church is to be committed to doing.

Review

I. THE PREACHERS OF PERFECTION (v. 11)

If the goal of the church is to perfect, mature, equip, complete the saints, then there has to be some instruments. In our last lesson we saw that the agents God uses are the preachers of perfection--the apostles, prophets, evangelist and teaching-shepherds of verse 11. According to Ephesians 2:20, the apostles and prophets have passed away; but the evangelists are still around to win the lost, and the teaching--shepherds to mature the saints. And the goal of both is perfect the saints.

II. THE PROGRESS TO PERFECTION (v. 12)

A. The Mandate

This is the mandate to perfection: (1) the gifted men equip, perfect, mature, or complete the saints;

(2) the saints then do the work of the ministry; (3) the edifying the body of Christ results. Let's look at each of these individually:

1. THE GIFTED MEN EQUIP THE SAINTS The teaching -shepherd and the evangelist are to equip perfect, and build the saints--to bring them maturity. Now the New Testament talks about four agencies of perfection: (1) The Word of God (2 Tim 3:16); (2) Prayer (Col. 4:12); (3) Trials (James 1:2-4); (4) Suffering (1 Pet. 5:10). Trials and suffering a God's business, but prayer and the Word are the responsibility of the gifted men.

a. Their Tools and Their Task

1) *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 good works.*" The task is to take the Word God and feed it to the people of God so that they can mature.

2) *Acts 6:4* - The apostles said, "*We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.*" They told those in the church to appoint some men to do the busy--work so that they could be totally committed to the Word and prayer.

3) *Colossians 1:28; 4:12* - Here we see the apostolic commitment, all that the gifted men have ever known. In talking about Christ, Paul says, "*Whom we preach, warning every man* (admonishing, or the negative side of preaching), *and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*" Paul's view of the ministry was very simple--get everybody and teach them everything, so that they may be totally mature. Then he adds the ministry of prayer in 4:12 "*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greeteth you always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God,*" The task of the gifted men is to be given to prayer and the ministry of the Word. There's no redeeming virtue in just evangelizing the saints over and over again; or in spending all your time thinking up programs, or in re-organizing the whole church. The church needs maturing, so let's spend our time maturing the saints. Let us give our lives to the prayer and the Word that changes people inside, not to the externals of programs and reorganizations.

4) *1 Timothy 4:6-13* - In these verses, Paul was telling Timothy how to perfect the saints. He told him to be "*nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine*" (v. 6), to "*refuse profane and old wives' fables*" (v. 7), "*to command and teach*" his congregation (v. 11), and to give himself to expository preaching--reading the text, explaining the text, and applying the text (v. 13). That was the goal the Apostle Paul had set for Timothy.

5) *2 Timothy 2:2* - Paul says to Timothy, "*The things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*"

6) *2 Timothy 4:2,3* - in Paul's final letter before he died, his swan song, he said to Timothy, "*Preach the Word; be diligent in season, out season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine.*"

*** The failure of the church**

The problems that usually arise in the church come because of a lack of knowledge. Hosea said, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*" (Hosea 4:6). This is definitely a problem in today's church. Time magazine once surveyed a number of churchgoers and came up with some amazing results. The survey asked Bible questions and the answers were hopeless: Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers. Jesus was baptized by Moses. Eve was created from an apple. The Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John. Jezebel was Ahab's jackass.... and on it went. The church's failure is not due to weak programming--its failure is due to weak teaching.

7) *2 Peter 1:12-15* - Is there ever a time in a man's ministry where he can stop teaching and just entertain because his people have all the facts? No! Peter said, "*I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and are established in the present truth.*" Even though he was to die shortly he said, "*I will endeavor that ye might be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.*" Peter was just going to keep saying it over and over again until he died, and even then he wanted the echo of his words in their minds. As the saints are matured, the work of the ministry gets going. But it will never happen if the church keeps spinning its wheels in committees and programs, and never gets around to the business of perfecting the saints. This is the priority! It's that simple.

2. THE SAINTS DO THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY

I've always been committed to teaching the Word of God and have believed that if the saints were perfected, they would do the work of the ministry. And you know something? I've seen it happen. The word "ministry" in the Greek is diakonia, which means "service." The saints are to function in service to one another. It's incredible to see it actually happen! When people mature and become strong, equipped, and complete, they begin to function, minister, and operate their spiritual gifts. This is the most exciting thing imaginable! As the Word of God is taught and the saints mature, they do the work of the ministry. * ***How do the people in the congregation do the work of the ministry?*** When I first started pastoring, I determined that I wasn't going to start any ministries, or get myself wrapped up in trying to run or crank out programs. I believed that the church should be a central place of teaching and perfecting the saints, and then the saints, would invent the ministries and get them moving. That is exactly that happened! In fact, our church staff is made up of people from the congregation who ministered so capably in their ministry, that they couldn't minister and be supported with their own livelihood; so we took over their support. That's the way you build a staff according to Ephesians 4. The saints do the work of the ministry, and those saints whose ministry develops to a place where they need support should be supported. I've seen this happen over and over again (i.e., the tape ministry, bus ministry, women's ministry, hospital ministry, jail ministry, etc.). The saints doing the work of the ministry! Spiritual service is everybody's task. That's why we are all gifted of the Holy Spirit.

3. THE BODY OF CHRIST WILL BE BUILT UP

If we all just continue to do what God has called us to do, the saints will do the work of the ministry and the body of Christ will be built up. It's built up two ways: (1) by the spiritual nurture of the saints; and (2) by evangelism, as more are added to the body. It's built internally and externally. The body is edified inside as it becomes more mature, and it's edified outside as it adds those who are being saved (see Acts 2:41-47). There is the progress to perfection: The gifted men perfect saints, the saints do the work of the ministry, and the body is built up.

III. THE PURPOSE OF PERFECTION (v. 13-15)

A The Five Purpose-Results

1. "THE UNITY OF THE FAITH" (v. 13a)

How do you get unity in a church? Unity of the faith is referring to the commonness of the faith -the content of the gospel - and there's nothing that achieves this unity more than maturity. The discord of the church comes out of carnality and an infantile spiritual mentality. Mature saints who understand the faith, are committed to the faith, love the faith, live the faith, all have a beautiful commonness. There can never be a true unity in a church without doctrinal integrity. There can be a quasi-spiritual relationship, but there will never be a unity of the faith apart from a solid doctrinal understanding. We must agree about Christ before we can agree in Christ. The spirit of oneness, love, commitment, and fellowship is based on solid doctrine. Any other effort toward unity is very superficial.

2. "THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SON OF GOD" (v. 13b)

This is not referring to a salvation knowledge rather a deep, intimate knowledge.a. It is the knowledge that Paul talked about in Philippians 3:10: "*That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; being made comformable unto His death.*" Now Paul, you say, "if anybody knows Christ, you know Christ. You met Him on the Damascus road. He appeared to you two other times. You've walked with Him all these. You've been in weakness and infirmity, and He stood with you. If anybody knows Him, you know Him!" And Paul says, "Oh, I haven't even begun to plumb the depths of all there is to know... Oh, that I may know Him." That's what it's saying here. There comes to those who are perfected ministering, built up, and who know the unity of the faith, a deep, personal, vital, real, honest relationship with the living Christ.b. It is the knowledge of Christ that Paul alludes to in Ephesians 3:17 where he desires "*that Christ may dwell*

(settle down and really be at home) *in your hearts*.” It is a knowing beyond the superficial!c. It is the knowledge of which Jesus spoke in John 10:14 when He said, “*I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep*.” He wasn’t saying, “I know who they are.” He was saying, “We have an intimacy.”d. It is the same kind of intimate knowledge that is referred to in Genesis 4:17 where it says that “*Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bore Enoch*.”e. It is that intimate knowledge of which God said of Israel, “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth*” (Amos 3:2). When the gifted men bring the saints to maturity, the saints will do the work of the ministry. When they do the work of the ministry, the body is built up. When the body is built up, there will be a marvelous unity and a deep, vital, real, personal, genuine, living experience with the living Christ.

3. “THE STATURE OF THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST” (v. 13c)

a. 1 John 2:6 - “*He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked*.” The church should represent Christ to the world. We should literally be Jesus Christ. Aren’t we the reincarnation of Jesus in the world? We are the only Christ this world is ever going to see! We are to be the “*perfect man*” and attain “*the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.”b. 2 Corinthians 3:18 - As we gaze on His glory and go deep into that personal relationship with Him, we will be changed into His image, from one level of glory to the next by the Holy Spirit. We are to be like Him. As we move toward Christlikeness, only then will the world look up and see Jesus Christ when it sees His church.

4. THE KNOWLEDGE OF SOUND DOCTRINE (v. 14)

“*We will no more be like children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight* (Gk. *kubia* = dice) *of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive*.” The phrase “*cunning craftiness*” is used in Ephesians 6:11 to speak of the devices of the devil. None of these things are going to fool us if we’re mature. But we better be discerning or we will be caught up in the conning of men--the dice-play of those who would deceive us--and the cunning craftiness of Satan. We’ll get tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine, just like children who don’t know the difference. If the church is ever to protect itself from all the con-men, hucksters dice-rollers, and corrupters—it’s going to have to mature! Where the gifted men perfect the saints, the saints do the work of the ministry; the body is built up; there will be unity of the faith; there will be a deep, abiding, personal, living relationship with Christ; there will be a Christlike maturity; there will be a doctrinal solidarity; and finally...

5. WE WILL SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE (v. 15)

If I could give this in one word, it would be evangelism. Only the edified, built up, functioning, mature, united, Christlike, confident, solid church can stand in the midst of the world and speak the truth in love. Evangelism comes at the tail end, doesn’t it? When the church is built, then the church has to speak! The greatest fear I have in my life is that we would be a whole bunch of doctrinal people who know all there is to know, and just sit around saying to each other, “We’ve got to go.” We have to do more than say it, we have to get out and do it!

IV. THE POWER OF PERFECTION (v. 15-16)

“Who is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth.” In other words, the whole thing hangs together Christ. Just like a human body is held together in functioning order by the life principles, so the church moves by the power of Christ. He is the One who is effectually working in every part and making the body increase to the edifying of itself in love. He is the power! Don’t ever let yourself get to the place where you think you’ve done something in your own power. God does it all and were just spectators. The only thing we can do is to be obedient to God’s Word; and where we are obedient, God works. It is not our creativity or ingenuity—it’s God’s power. Zechariah 4:6 puts it simply, “*Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit*.” It is Christ in His Spirit, alive in--the church, who pulls it all together and makes things happen. He is the power of perfection.

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