

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

EQUIPPING, MINISTRY, AND MATURITY!

Read Ephesians 4:11-16

Introduction

Today, we will study five gifts which Christ has given to the church, and how they fulfil the purpose of unity. This purpose of the unity of God's people is primary. It is the cause we must strive for. Our goal isn't just structural or organizational unity but spiritual unity: that the Church of Jesus Christ -- in our congregation, between the congregations in our community, and extending to the bodies of congregations throughout the earth -- might practice, with love, the unity of Christ's Body that surely exists in heaven and must exist here on earth so that the world might see Christians who love one another.

Our passage speaks about

- The purpose of pastors and leaders: to develop ministry
- The purpose of ministry: to develop maturity
- The purpose of maturity: unity with Christ and his church

The Five Christ Gifts

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...” (v11)

The phrase “He Himself”: This means that Jesus established these offices. They are the work and appointment of Jesus, not men. Though pretenders may lay claim to them, the offices themselves are a Divine institution and not a human invention.

Exactly what are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers? Let's define some terms:

Defining an Apostle

"Apostle" (Greek *apostolos*) designates one who has been sent with a commission and can mean a "delegate, envoy, messenger." In the NT it is used as a technical term to refer to Christ-designated messengers given authority to speak for him and to establish his church. They are special ambassadors of God's work, though not in the same authoritative sense of the first century apostles. Those first century apostles were used to provide a foundation (preserved as the New Testament) as described in Ephesians 2:20.

Defining Prophets

Prophets speak forth words from God in complete consistency with the foundation of the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes they speak in a predictive sense, but not necessarily so, and they are always subject to the discernment and judgment of the church leadership (1 Corinthians 14:29). As with the apostles, modern prophets do not speak in the same authority as the first century prophets brought God's foundational word spoke (Ephesians 2:20).

Paul encouraged all to prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:5), that is, to speak under the anointing of the Holy Spirit the immediate and upbuilding Word of God but that does not make the person a Prophet. It is one thing to win someone to Christ, it is another to be an Evangelist. It is one thing to teach a lesson, it is

another to be a Teacher. In the same way, while many Christians may prophesy occasionally, few of these will have the ministry of being a Prophet.

Defining Evangelists

Next Paul speaks of evangelists. This role isn't spelled out very well in the New Testament, though clearly it has to do with proclaiming the Good News and comes from the Greek word "euangelizo", to proclaim good news. The noun is used twice, in a technical ministry sense referring to Philip (Acts 21:8), and in a functional sense referring to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:5).

Philip's ministry involved preaching to the Samaritans and winning them to Christ (mass evangelism, Acts 8:4-13), as well as witnessing to and winning the treasurer of Ethiopia, whom he saw riding in a chariot (one-to-one evangelism, Acts 8:26-40). Timothy was encouraged to do the work of an Evangelist which is the general command to all Christians to win souls, but this did not make Timothy an Evangelist neither does it make anyone who wins souls occasionally an Evangelist.

Defining Pastors

Our word "pastor" (with the related word "pasture") means, literally, "shepherd." A pastor or shepherd leads the flock, protects it, guides it to places where there is grass to eat and water to drink. He heals the sheep that are hurt, assists in birth, and with tenderness cares for the flock.

This describes pretty well what a resident spiritual leader does for a group or congregation, which is sometimes referred to as a "flock" (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:2-3). The larger the church is, the more pastors are needed. In fact, in the largest churches, the "senior pastor" may need additional gifts of faith, leadership, teaching, or administration. In the New Testament church, the words "elder" (presbyteros), pastor (poimēn), and bishop or overseer (episcopos) are used synonymously. You can observe this by comparing 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; and Titus 1:5-9.

Defining Teachers

The teacher (didaskalos) has a role closely related to the pastoral function, but somewhat specialized. The pastor is more a leader of and carer for people, while the teacher grounds people in truth and helps them to understand the implications of truth as it pertains to their everyday lives.

Of course, none of these lines can be drawn with heavy black markers; they often fade into one another. Timothy was a pastor and teacher, told to do the work of an evangelist. Paul was an apostle, but clearly, he functioned as a pastor during part of his ministry, as well as a teacher. He taught by his letters when there were no people close-by he could teach. He was an evangelist, and you might argue that he was also a prophet. Jesus, too, took on all these roles in his ministry.

These gifts are given at the discretion of Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11). The importance of having "all five in operation" in any church body is up to Jesus who appoints the offices. The job of responsible church leadership is to not hinder or prevent such ministry, but never to "promote it into existence."

Purpose of the Ministry

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"
(vv11-12)

The purpose of these gifts of leadership is also clear. It is that saints (God's people) might be equipped for the work of ministry (service), so that the body of Christ would be built up (expanded and strengthened). "Equipping" also has the idea of "to put right." This ancient Greek word was used to describe setting broken bones or mending nets. These ministries work together to produce strong, mended, fit Christians.

In other words, the job of pastors, teachers, and other ministers is to equip, prepare, and train the believers so they can learn to function in ministries. This is the way that the church will be built up; not by the leaders doing everything themselves, but by the leaders equipping the rest of the people to function in ministries.

A church in which only the leaders are working to build the church is weak. It is sick. A healthy congregation is one in which the leaders succeed in motivating, training, and deploying the people in a variety of ministries according to the gifts of each member, all of whom bring strength and depth to the ministry of the Body as a whole, and which bring about the maturity of the Body.

The Nature of a Mature Church

"... till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." (vv13-16)

Are we spiritual infants? Are we being carried about with every wind of doctrine i.e., being tossed to and fro? Is the church submitting itself to the trickery of men and demonic cunning craftiness?

Look at the description of the healthy, mature church:

- Unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus (13a)
- Attaining to the fullness of Christ (13b)
- Speaking the truth in love (15a)
- Growing up into Christ, the Head of the Body (15b)
- An infrastructure of joined and supporting bones, ligaments, and muscles, which can then support (16a)
- Sustained bodily growth (16b)
- Sustained development of increased strength and new infrastructure as needed (16c) with
- Each part of the body doing its work (16d)

When this begins to take shape, we and our churches won't be "infants" which are tossed and blown and manipulated (Ephesians 4:14). People won't be deceiving each other with surface level niceties or "tell it like it is" bluntness which blows the other person away. Instead, we'll be "speaking the truth," but also speaking it "with love." Honesty with tenderness and compassion will build Christ's church in a way that won't require it to be dismantled and rebuilt properly.

The latter part of v16 AMP states: *"when each part is working properly, causes the body to grow and mature, building itself up in [unselfish] love."*

Please pay attention to the last phrase of this passage: *"when each part is working properly"* (verse 16d). This brings us back to where we started. The job of the leaders is to equip each part to do its work.

Ultimately, each member must commit himself or herself to giving time and energy to the gifts and ministries God has given.

The purpose of all this is found in two places:

- **verse 13b AMP** -- *"to become a mature believer, reaching to the measure of the fullness of Christ [manifesting His spiritual completeness and exercising our spiritual gifts in unity]."*

and

- **verse 15b AMP** -- *"let us grow up in all things into Him [following His example] who is the Head—Christ."*

This sounds very much like the overarching theme of the whole letter found in 1:10 AMP *"to bring all things together in Christ, [both] things in the heavens and things on the earth."*

What does this mean in practice?

1. It requires pastors, teachers, and ministry leaders to concentrate on their primary role of equipping.
2. It requires members of the congregation to discover their ministry gifts / passion and begin to practice them effectively ("so that the body of Christ may be built up") and diligently ("as each part does its work")

It requires leaders to lead and church members to follow their leaders into the exciting task of seeing before our eyes the Church of Jesus Christ begin more and more to feel and sound and act and love like Jesus Christ himself in this world. Amen.