

# God's Provision for Edification in the Church

## Introduction

In our last session we saw that whatever happens at the local gathering of members of the Body of Christ, it must help each individual believer to fulfill his or her personal responsibilities to God and others. The local gathering of members of the Body of Christ provides an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to minister to each member through the other members.

The apostle Paul told the church at Corinth: "Let all things be done for edification." (1 Cor 14:26) All of the things we do when we gather together in the local meeting of the Body of Christ must be done for the edification of the body -- the building up and instruction of believers for growth toward spiritual maturity. The local church becomes a process through which believers benefit from the equipping gifts of other believers. This process is also repetitive, with believers continually becoming better equipped for their responsibilities as they pass through this process over and over again.



We also saw that in gatherings of the early church, the Word of God was the most important component because that is the primary tool for building up the body of Christ. As we traced the importance of the Word of God through the history of the early church, we saw that true church growth is growth in the Word of God.

The local gathering of members of the body of Christ should provide an environment where believers can minister to each other and build each other up in their faith, especially through sharing and applying the Word of God in each other's lives.

Now in this session we will be examining in detail one of the key passages of Scripture that tells us what God has provided for the edification of the church.

## What has God provided for the edification of the church?

In an earlier session we saw in Ephesians 4:7-8 that, as a result of Christ's ascension into heaven and the giving of a new ministry to the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, there were special gifts that were given to the body of Christ for the proper operation of the church. In our session today, we will be taking a detailed look at the passage of Scripture following this in Ephesians four. Ephesians 4:11-16 is a key passage that tells us how the body of Christ (and especially the gift of pastor/teacher) should function when the church gathers.

First let's begin with a little background on the letter written by the apostle Paul to the Ephesians. This letter to the Ephesians was written by Paul around the year 60 A.D. This was about thirty years after the death of Christ, and Paul himself died a few years after he wrote this letter. Several other parts of the New Testament were written about this time, but when Paul wrote this letter some of the gospel accounts did not yet exist. The New Testament was not completely written until about the year 95 A.D. when the apostle John was exiled on the island of Patmos and wrote the book of Revelation. But when we get to the end of the book of Revelation, we could take our pen and write "The End" after that last book of the Bible. However, during the time when the Scriptures were not yet complete -- during the time when Paul was writing the book of Ephesians -- there were special gifts that were operating to authenticate the Word of God and the messengers being sent with this new revelation.

### **The Gift (Eph 4:11)**

In examining Ephesians 4:11-16, one of the things to note is that this passage is all one sentence in the original Greek text. Paul's first topic of discussion is "The Gift" in verse eleven. The word "He" refers to Christ, as we can tell from the context. In verse 7 it says, "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift." So we can see that Christ is the Giver, and He gave gifts to individuals so that they would function as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers within the body of Christ. Christ is giving these gifted people to serve the believers in the church. Christ provides gifted people because when the church meets there are special ways in which we need to minister to each other.

There were apostles who functioned as the foundation of the church; there were prophets who received the New Testament revelation from God (Eph 2:20); there were evangelists who witnessed to Christ and taught others to do so; and there were pastor/teachers who taught the flock the truths of the Word of God. There were also many other unique gifts, sign gifts and miracle gifts, that were in operation during the time when the New Testament was still being written and when the church was being founded. There was a period of time when these unique gifts were needed because they attested to the authenticity of the Word of God. But after the apostle John wrote the book of Revelation, after the New Testament was completed, these sign gifts were no longer needed.

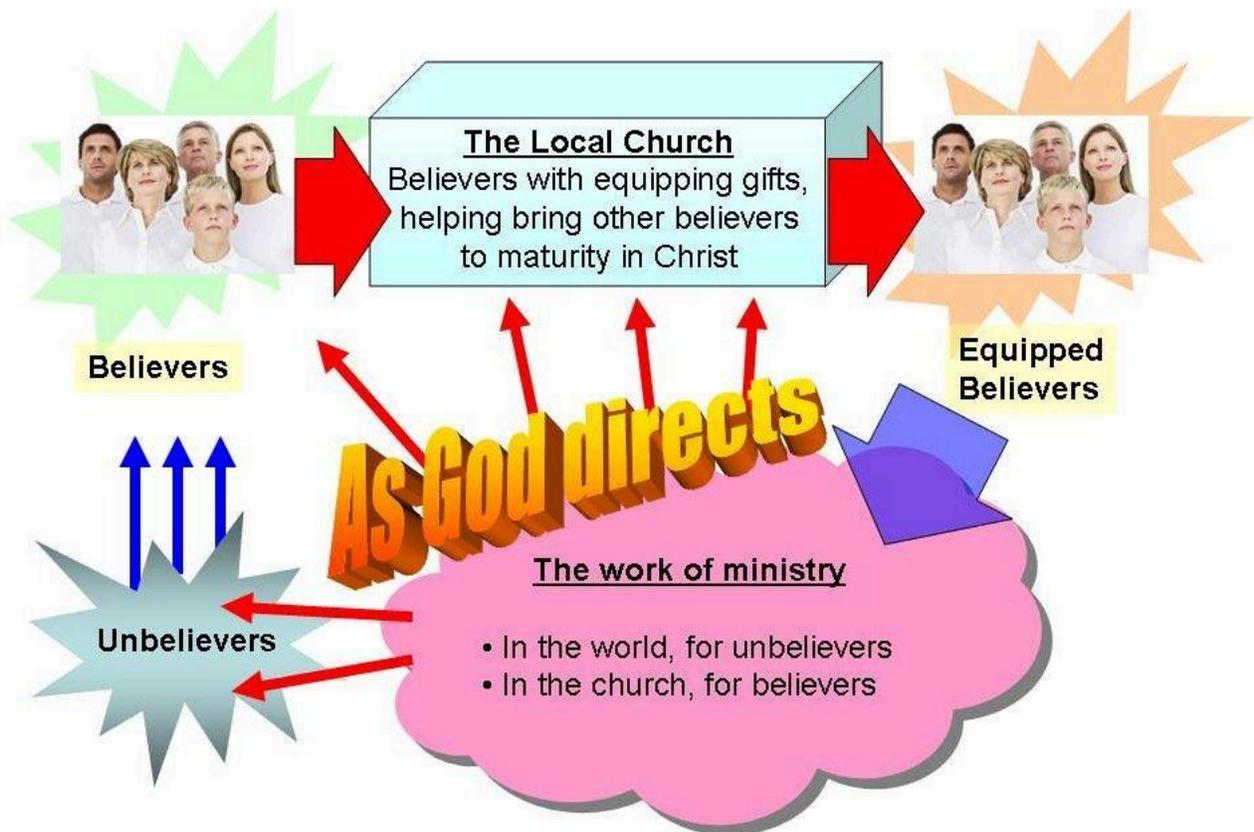
In the passage of Scripture we are studying today, the apostle Paul listed four categories of spiritual gifts -- gifts given to people -- to minister to believers in the church. Some of these people were apostles, some were prophets, some were evangelists, and some were pastor/teachers. As we mentioned earlier, the apostles and prophets were important when the church was just getting started, so we can think of them as "foundational gifts" that were active before the Scriptures were complete. These ministries are no longer needed since the completion of the New Testament. Evangelists and Pastor/Teachers are gifts that are still required today, as well as many other gifts which the apostles Paul and Peter talk about in other books of the New Testament.

### **The Purpose (Eph 4:12)**

The next topic of discussion is "The Purpose" in verse twelve. Why did Christ give these gifts? This is a key point that many churches miss. Why did Christ give us pastor/teachers? What did He expect to happen when the believers met together? The word "for" at the beginning of verse twelve is the Greek preposition "pros" which can be translated "for, to, toward, leading toward, for the purpose of." In this case the preposition carries the meaning "for the purpose of" --Christ is telling us why He gave us these gifted people. This is one of the key verses that I think should be the foundation of every

church. The purpose for having pastor/teachers is “for (pros) the equipping of the saints for (eis) the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.” This is a good job description for a pastor/teacher -- the “equipping” of the saints. Who is being equipped here? Is it unbelievers that we are trying to attract into the Sunday morning service? No, the time when the church gathers should be an equipping time. And the works of service are to be done by the believers who have been equipped for ministry. Many churches are built upon a professional ministry model where the pastor/teacher is the “certified professional” who should be doing all of the ministry work. But that is not what the Scriptures say. The pastor/teacher is Christ’s equipper to equip the saints to do the work of ministry (“deaconing”).

What is this work of service? It refers to any of the many responsibilities that each individual believer has in his relationship to God, to other believers, and to non-believers in the world around us. The building up of the body by gifted equippers is what should occur when the church gathers. It is really important for us to understand what we are supposed to be doing when we get together as believers on Sunday morning. The meeting of the church should serve its God-given purpose as an equipping time for the saints. We might picture it this way, by adding to the diagram we showed in the last session.



### The Measure (Eph 4:13)

How will we know when we have accomplished Christ’s purpose for us when we meet? That is the topic of discussion in verse thirteen -- “The Measure.” This verse says, “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” The word “until” is a clear marker in the text that the things being discussed are how we will know when we have accomplished Christ’s purpose. When “we all

attain” to the things mentioned, then we have accomplished the goal of equipping the saints. These clauses give us the way to measure our effectiveness in equipping:

**“to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God;”** The first clause says that there will be doctrinal unity -- agreement on the truths of “The Faith,” which involves a clear knowledge of the body of beliefs that are central to biblical Christianity. Paul is advocating doctrinal agreement, which implies that the church has a clear and detailed doctrinal statement. Jude 1:3 says, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” When you became a believer, did the deliveryman arrive at your door with a package and say, “Here is *the faith* once for all delivered to the saints!” No! Where is *The Faith* that has been once for all handed down to the saints? It is in the completed Bible.

Notice what is not mentioned in this list of ways to measure whether we have accomplished Christ’s purpose for the church. It does not say, “When we all attain to an experience of God’s presence, or to the Spirit “falling” on us, or to a feel-good relationship with our fellow-man.” Paul makes it clear that we are to attain to the unity of The Faith. I have had pastors of churches that we have been involved with tell me that they did not want me to talk about doctrine, because doctrine is divisive and can cause church splits. We should instead focus on winning souls for Christ, because the details of doctrine are secondary. But the details of doctrine were not secondary to the apostle Paul. We must unite together under what we believe to be true from the Scriptures. Our unity will not be some mushy-gushy relational unity -- “Oh, I just love everybody at this church!” When we agree on the truths of Scripture -- “I believe this is what the Bible says” -- we will have the kind of unity that Paul is discussing here.

**“to a mature man; to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”** The word for *mature* means complete or full in our knowledge of the Son of God and in the truths of The Faith. A man is not mature just because he can grow a beard. This kind of maturity involves growth in our understanding of *The Truth* as revealed by God in the Scriptures. We are to measure up to the stature of the fullness of Christ. How many of us could raise our hand to indicate that we have reached the measure of the fullness of Christ? No, we are all growing toward this goal -- but we should see clear progress in maturity as a result of the equipping time on Sunday mornings in the church. We must all commit to getting ourselves to a place where we can have gifted equippers help us grow to maturity in the faith.

## The Result

In verses fourteen through sixteen we see “The Result.” We have seen the gifts, Christ’s purpose for giving the gifts, and how we will know when we have fulfilled His purpose. Now we can see the result. In verse fourteen the apostle Paul tells us negatively what should not result. Then in verses fifteen & sixteen he tells us positively what should be the result.

### Negatively: (Eph 4:14)

Eph 4:14 says, “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.” The phrase “as a result” is a clear marker in the text that this is what will happen when we fulfill Christ’s purpose. First, we are no longer to be children. You young people may think of yourselves as children, but you are not according to the apostle Paul. The word that he uses for “children” is the

Greek word *napios*. When Vicki and I were in England once we discovered that we really do not speak the same language! One of the words that is different there is the word “napkin” --which means diaper in Great Britain! They refer to it as a “nappy.” When I think of the Greek word “napios” I think of a little infant who wears a “nappy.” And that is exactly what this Greek word means -- “an infant who does not speak.” When young children are infants, they do not speak for the first several months of their life -- it takes them a while to learn how to speak and walk and feed themselves. In the church, if we are properly “equipping the saints” they will no longer be infants who are unable to do anything for themselves -- they will not be little newborn babes forever. Little infants have a burning desire to grow up, and new believers should be the same way -- having a burning desire to learn and grow in the things of God.

Paul also says we will not be “tossed here and there by waves” and “carried about” by three specific things. Being *tossed* and *carried* are good words to describe how you would handle a baby, and they are verbs that imply having no control over these actions – the baby is the passive recipient of a power outside itself. On a rough sea, one second you are here and the next second you are there. It is very disconcerting, and can make a person very seasick.

The first thing that will carry us about is “every wind of doctrine.” The word for “doctrine” means teaching. If you turn on the TV at any given time (public television or religious broadcasting), you might see someone standing there holding a Bible or a bottle of vitamins giving their latest teaching on how you should live. I recently saw an article in the newspaper about a university professor who shared a new “teaching” about why there is so much rudeness in our culture -- rudeness is because we do not know how we feel about the technology that surrounds us. Everyone in our society feels free to share every sort of strange “wind of doctrine.”

The “trickery of men and the craftiness of deceitful scheming” are clearly evident in all those who are attempting to get our money into their pockets, or who are trying to recruit followers to adhere to their option or cause. What can prevent us from being affected by forces outside of ourselves? We must have equippers that do the equipping of the saints. If we are following God’s plan to equip the saints, then the saints will become wise and be able to discern truth from error. Then we won’t be tossed here and there, saying “Well, that sounds right -- maybe I should go and do that new thing.” The equipping of the saints must happen, or the result will be continual immaturity and being tossed about forever.

Churches that don’t do the “equipping of the saints” on Sunday morning but are geared toward inoffensive “seeker sensitive” services, will find themselves targeting their teaching to the lowest common denominator -- to the fleshly desires of the unsaved. They will not be teaching the truths of God’s Word (the unity of The Faith) or the knowledge of the Son of God. They will be teaching superficial messages geared to the felt needs of those attending, hoping to make them feel good about themselves so they will return to hear the gospel and respond. While we applaud the goal of having the unsaved receive Christ as their Savior, that is not what the focus of the Sunday morning church service is supposed to be. What we need to do is to equip the saints to do the work of leading others to Christ. If we do not equip the saints on Sunday morning, then the result will be a church full of infants who are tossed here and there and carried about by every wind of doctrine. If you have geared your church service to produce babies and you have a church full of infants, then you have no right to reprimand them for not doing the works of service which are characteristic of maturing

believers. It is the responsibility of the church to build itself up through the ministry of gifted leaders who will equip the saints for the work of the ministry.

**Positively: (Eph 4:15-16)**

In verses fifteen & sixteen we see the contrast to what the church should not look like (as presented in verse fourteen).

“But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

In order for the church to see the result of fulfilling God’s purpose, every joint must do its part and every individual member must be working properly. The same word is used for the members working in verse sixteen as was used in verse twelve (equipped for the works of service).

If we decide to follow the pattern presented in Ephesians 4:11-16 for how the church should function, some people will say that we are doing church the wrong way -- we should be inviting the lost into the Sunday service so the church can fulfill the Great Commission by presenting the gospel. But Ephesians 4:11-16 clearly tells us that if we spend our time on Sunday morning equipping the saints for the work of ministry, then we are promised that we will see the growth of the body. There may not be anyone in this room today who “gets saved” (as some people say) -- who trusts in Christ as their Savior for the first time. So does that mean that we have failed as a church today? No, because we are doing the job that God’s Word tells us to do. And what will happen is that once the church becomes increasingly mature, we will grow beyond infancy and will be able to effectively minister to people we come into contact with everywhere in our daily lives. We as individual believers will begin to bring others to a saving knowledge of Christ and they can then join us on Sunday morning to be built up in their faith. Ephesians 4:11-16 does not say that we will see thousands of people come to Christ in our services, but it implies that when we equip the saints for the work of ministry, the unsaved will be drawn to Christ by what they see in our lives. They are not going to be drawn to Christ if we are wearing a “nappy.”

If we build a church on this foundation it may take longer to see growth, but we will be operating the local church the way God says to do it. We each need to commit to putting ourselves and our families into a local church where believers with equipping gifts are equipping us toward the goal of spiritual maturity. We have tried doing church the other way -- the “seeker sensitive” approach -- and today there are dozens of churches in this city which are targeting their Sunday services this way. If there are so many churches doing this, then why hasn’t the whole community been brought to Christ by now? Why isn’t this approach working? I think it is because it focuses on the wrong things -- the local church should be equipping the saints for the work of ministry. And people are going to come to Christ in office cubicles, and over back yard fences, and in automobiles traveling from place to place. These are the places where the Great Commission is going to be fulfilled. And the local gathering of the members of the body of Christ on Sunday morning should be fulfilling its function to edify or build up believers, to equip them for the work of ministry.