

The Church, God's Plan for This Age: Every Member Ministry for Maturity in the Body of Christ

Ephesians 4:11-16

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The church is essential for growth into Christian maturity because Christ has sovereignly endowed every believer with special abilities to minister to all the other members. It is the responsibility of divinely gifted leaders to equip the body for a life of mutual service. The goal of ministry is to help all believers grow in a knowledge of Christ and of the core doctrines of the faith, to mature to a greater Christlikeness, and to manifest love for one another in the life of the church.

Gifted leaders equip the entire body for mutual ministry (4:11-16).

1. Christ's sovereign distribution of gifted people to the church (11).
 - a. The resurrected Christ has bestowed His grace on every member of His body, but He has especially gifted certain individuals within the church to establish new churches, minister the word of God, and equip others for service in the church.
 - b. "HE gave" – this intensifying pronoun emphasizes that Christ is the one who sovereignly works to raise up and supply gifted leaders to the church. They are not elected officials, or offices to be achieved by working your way up through the ranks; they are roles fulfilled by people whom Jesus Himself sovereignly chooses and enables for service.
 - c. The 5-fold list of leadership roles in the church is not comprehensive, but are listed here because they were foundational to the establishment of local churches (2:20) and because they are the principal ministers responsible for the proclamation and application of God's Word to peoples' lives which is critical to being rooted in the faith (4-6) and critical for maturity (4:13-14).
 - d. The Foundational Gifts: apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the early church (2:20).
 - i. The Apostles were chosen by Christ (Mark 3:14).
 1. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas (Acts 1:21-22).
 2. Paul was chosen by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15).
 3. Apostles and prophets laid the foundation of the church by writing the New Testament under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 4. Apostolic doctrine is referred to as "the faith" (Jude 1:3) or "the gospel" (1 Cor. 15:1-11).
 5. The Apostles laid the doctrinal foundation upon which the church today is built.
 - ii. Prophets proclaimed messages from God to the early church while the NT was being written.
 1. Sometimes a prophet's message revealed new truth from God.
 2. Other times a prophet's message predicted future events (Acts 11:28).
 3. Prophets proclaimed God's message to people who did not have access to it otherwise.
 4. Since there were many false prophets claiming to speak for God, the early church was cautioned to compare every prophetic message with the Scriptures (1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).
 5. Now that the Scriptures are complete, Peter tells us that we have a "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 2:16-21).
 - e. The Building Gifts: Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers
 - i. Evangelists are gifted in the proclamation of the gospel to the lost and equipping the saints to evangelize their communities (Acts 8:5ff).
 1. Evangelists preach Christ to the lost (8:5-6).
 2. Evangelists start churches (8:12).
 3. Evangelists sometimes pastor churches (Acts 22:8-9).
 - ii. Pastor-Teachers are gifted in the teaching of the Word of God to equip and shepherd the body.
 1. Pastors watch over their assembly and provide oversight (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
 2. Pastors are gifted to teach God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9-10).
 3. Pastors instruct the saints in the Word of God (2 Timothy 4:2).
 4. Pastors are commanded to do the work of the evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5).

2. The function of gifted leaders: evangelists and pastor-teachers equip the saints (12)
 - a. Evangelists and pastor-teachers equip the saints for the work of the ministry.
 - i. Through the ministry of the Word, individual believers are equipped to do the work of the ministry (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - ii. The goal of this equipping ministry is the building up of the body Christ.
 - b. Application:
 - i. As a church matures in the Word, it should also mature in the involvement of its members in the work of the ministry.
 - ii. Every believer has a gifting and a calling to minister to the body.
 - iii. It's the responsibility of the leadership of the church to discern, equip, train, and deploy the individual members of the body for effective ministry.

3. Three goals of every member ministry (13-16).
 - a. Growth in the knowledge of Christ and Christlikeness (13).
 - i. Every member ministry strengthens our unity in the doctrines of the faith (13a).
 - ii. Every member ministry strengthens our knowledge of the Son of God (13b).
 - iii. Every member ministry makes us more mature and Christlike (13c).
 - iv. Application:
 1. Ministry is a critical part of Christlikeness. Those who refuse to humble themselves to minister to others and be ministered unto are not very Christlike no matter how much theology they claim to know.
 2. Those who don't learn to minister to others do not know Christ as intimately as they might think that they do.
 3. The doctrines of Christ are critical in cooperative Christian ministry.
 - b. Avoidance of dangerous and deceitful teaching (14).
 - i. The goal of every member ministry is doctrinal maturity.
 - ii. The goal of every member ministry is theological discernment.
 - c. Development of maturity in speaking the truth in love (15-16).
 - i. Your gift should always be a vehicle for speaking the truth in love.
 - ii. If you want to become like Christ, surround yourself with people that will tell you the truth in love.
 - iii. Speaking the truth in love is the responsibility of every member.
 - iv. Every member is expected to contribute.

Conclusion:

1. Do you see yourself as a minister?
2. How has God called you to minister to the body?
3. What does your ministry to others reveal about how well you know the Bible and its Author?
4. Does your ministry help others grow in Christ-likeness?
5. Are you surrounding yourself with people who will speak the truth in love to you? Are you one who speaks the truth in love to those around you?