

Ephesians 4

Unity of the Spirit

¹¹And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

God included both Jews and Gentiles in His church. He proved that by giving each person, no matter their background a spiritual gift and a place in the church. Paul listed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers as the gifts that some people in the church given. The people who play these roles in the church are a gift to the church. The factor each of these gifts has in common is that each of them teaches the gospel and tells the truth. Let's take a closer look at each of these gifts that were listed.

Apostles: Apostles include the original 12 that Jesus called plus Matthias, the Apostle Paul, Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Jesus' brother James (Galatians 1:19), Silas (1 Thess. 2:6), Andronicus and Junius (Romans 16:7).

The qualifications for being an apostle were to have seen the risen Christ, to be sent out by him to preach the gospel, and they oversee the development of all the churches in a large area. Miracles, signs and wonders accompanied the apostles to authenticate their message (2 Corinthians 12:12).

I do not believe there are any true super apostles today like Paul and Peter and the others. In a way, our district leaders carry out part of the role of an apostle in that they oversee many churches providing us support and direction when we need it.

Prophets: At times prophets would tell the future (Acts 11:28), but more often their job was to encourage, confront and strengthen God's people (Acts 15:32, 1 Corinthians 14:29).

Evangelists: Evangelists were traveling ministers similar to missionaries today. I will refer to this position as a missionary. Missionaries went to non-Christian people and told them about Jesus. Often they started churches after a number of people in a certain area came to faith in Christ. Then they brought in a person with the next spiritual gift.

Pastor and Teachers: Pastors and teachers are not two different roles but a description of one role in the church. This position could be called a Pastor-Teacher. Apostles, Prophets and Missionaries have a universal calling to minister all over the place. God gives pastors-Teachers to individual churches.

WHO'S YOUR MINISTER?

How many ministers are there in our church? Some might say, well, we have one pastor; therefore we have one minister in the church. Paul shows that God gives pastors and teachers to the church not to be the ministers of the church but to equip the ministers. Who then are the ministers? All Christians are to be ministers, so you are one of them. The role of pastors and teachers is to train and equip the “saints” (all believers) to be able to serve in whatever way God has called them. So, if your church has one hundred members and only one minister, there's a big problem. We are all called to be ministers. In what ways are you training to use your gift to strengthen other members of the church?

It's kind of funny that in our churches only the pastors get a performance review. If the pastor did not prepare for a sermon and did a shoddy job he would be fired. If a pastor did not meet with those who needed pastoral counseling or those who wanted to have a wedding or funeral he would be disciplined. Yet if all of us according to God are ministers then God holds us accountable to do our job even if we don't hold

one another accountable. If I had one wish as a pastor it would be that I could see a church where every person was working toward discovering and using the abilities and gifts God has given them. A church where every person is eager to serve and love one another.

(Apostles, prophets, missionaries and pastor-teachers are given)

¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

The specially gifted people like pastors and missionaries are given to the church for one primary goal: to equip the saints. The pastor-teachers and missionaries equip the believers to do the work of the ministry, which results in the building up the body of Christ. The church builds itself in the faith as the members care for one another, show love, and generally manifest the other gifts God gives like those mentioned in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12.

¹³until 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.

MATURITY THEME

Verse 13 mentions a “mature man”. It also speaks of the measure of the stature, which is a reference to growing up in our faith. Verse 14 says that we should no longer be children.

What is the difference between a grown up Christian and a baby Christian? A baby cannot feed him or herself. They cannot attend to the needs of others. They cannot think beyond their immediate needs and wants. Babies and toddlers are self-centered. One of the first words an infant learns is the word “mine”. Mine, mine, mine.

The mark of a baby Christian is that they do not know how to feed themselves and take care of themselves and they do not see or care about meeting the needs of other Christians. Now that is ok if you have just become a Christian. You have to start somewhere. But if you have been a Christian many years you must learn how to feed yourself. You must learn how to hear the voice of the Spirit of God speak into your heart. You must learn to discipline yourself and make good choices that please the Lord. You must learn to see the needs of others and center a lot of your church life on meeting the needs of others.

¹⁴As 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;

There were those in Paul's day that tried to get people to buy into false teachings and join cult groups. If we do not grow up in our ability to feed ourselves with the word of God we will be more susceptible to false teaching. False teachers and cult groups are alive today.

¹⁵but speaking the truth in love,

Truth and love are two major aspects of growing up. When you know that by speaking the truth you will get someone upset it can be very difficult to speak the truth. Often those who have a great problem with confrontation have to get so riled up that finally they blurt out the truth and it looks more like a hissy than speaking the truth in love.

Other people have such a difficult time speaking the truth that they send signals. They don't like something at the church or with a friend or at work and so they quit going so that hopefully they send a signal and people will get the message. People will get paid back by the message I send.

Passive resistance is another replacement for speaking the truth. Passive resistance is when we agree to do something but we drag our feet just like a little kids goes very slowly and reluctantly when they don't want to help with chores.

Speaking the truth in love means that when you speak people know it is the truth and you really say what you mean and you do not say half-truths or drop hints or fail to say what you need to say. Speaking the truth in love means that as you speak the truth you speak not to an enemy but to a brother or sister in Christ that you love. Speaking the truth in love mean that when I have a problem with a brother or sister in the Lord I do not dump stuff on them and walk away. Love dictates that I speak my mind and then we remain engaged as brothers or sisters until we work out the issue together. If you cannot speak the truth in love then you need healing and maturity in Christ. God will heal you and give you the confidence to speak the truth in love.

we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

We are to grow up in all aspects. That means we learn more about Jesus by studying his word and by growing up emotionally where we forgive people and let go of bitterness. Growing up in all aspects into Christ means we deepen our personal relationship with Jesus by spending time with Him so that we know how to hear his voice. We get rid of the hurts and fears we have so that we can speak the truth in love to one another. And we live a holy life as Jesus gives us the grace and spiritual power to do so.

Lastly, we learn to connect with other Christians and encourage one another so that I come to church not to get fed but to feed someone else. I come because of what I can give away rather than what I am going to get.

Those are some of the ways we can measure whether we are growing up in all ways in Christ.

¹⁶from 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.

BODY HEALS AND FEEDS ITSELF

The human body is made in such a way that it can take care of itself. When the body is wounded it has a process where bones mend themselves, cuts scab over and heal. White blood cells attack intruding germs and parasites. When we need food our brain and limbs are able to find and prepare nourishment and get it through the mouth into the stomach where other parts of the body break it down and send it to the right places keeping us strong.

The body of Christ is made up of every Christian. Some of the Christians feed the body because God gave them a gift to preach and teach the truth from God's word. Other Christians heal the body by giving words of encouragement, hospitality and love. Each gift helps in some way to make the entire church stronger. We are here for one another. Not for ourselves. The unity of faith appears in verse 8. Unity means we are working for one cause. To love Jesus more and to take care of the body comprised of other Christians in the way that God has given us to serve one another.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Did you realize the pastor is not the only minister in the church? He is called to equip the ministers of the church?
2. If that is true, what area of ministry has God called you to? Are you seeking God about that? Are you getting equipped and ready to do the ministry God has given you?

3. What are some things that God needs to change or heal in you so that you have the courage and the love to *speak the truth in love*?
4. We are called to grow up and mature in all ways in Christ. This means....
 - a. we grow closer to God,
 - b. we grow in our knowledge and ability to handle the word of God,
 - c. we understand our role in the church and we do the ministry God has called us to do,
 - d. we live a holy life, and
 - e. we speak the truth in love.

Which of these areas is God putting on your heart right now? What are you willing to do to let the Lord address you and teach you in this area?